

Introduction

From December 1936 to September 3, 1939, the day the war broke out, and from June 15, 1940 to the end of April 1943, I worked as a diplomatic official of the Reich at the German Embassy in Paris. During the first period I was Attache and personal advisor to Ambassador Count Welczeck, during the second period I was Counsellor to the Legation and Head of the Political Department under Ambassador Otto Abetz.

Both ambassadors placed their personal trust in me. I therefore know that it was the sincere wish of both their hearts, both that of the Silesian aristocrat Count Welczeck and that of the "incorrigible Baden democrat", as Ribbentrop described Abetz, to do everything in their power to reach an understanding with our western neighbor that would have made it possible to work together to build up Europe. Both failed due to the incomprehension of the Berlin government, which was, however, strongly supported by the incomprehension of many Frenchmen.

Ambassador Otto Abetz, the author of this book, was not only my boss, he was and is my personal friend. Those who doubt the sincerity and honesty of this German patriot's attitude towards our neighboring country, France, do not know him. The French court that sentenced him to a long prison term, out of political blindness and lack of instinct, passed a sentence that will go down in history as one of the most classic miscarriages of justice alongside the sentence against President Laval.

Reading Abetz's book, no unbiased reader will be able to deny their admiration for the author's serene judgment of the people and things of recent Franco-German history.

"Si l'Allemagne sait dominer sa victoire, la France saura dominer sa defaite", said Marshal Petain in his radio address to the French people after his meeting with Hitler in Montoire.

Chancellor Adenauer could shout the same thing in the same formulation to the Western powers today.

Pétain's appeal had to contend with the all too human fact that not only vanity - as Bismarck thought - but also victory is a mortgage on intelligence. The victor all too easily falls prey to hubris and forgets that the ever-turning wheel of history can suddenly bring about new situations that require a good understanding with yesterday's defeated enemy.

appear desirable. However, it is usually too late to achieve this goal.

When, after the Allied landing in North Africa, Hitler instructed the German embassy in Paris to inform the French government that Germany was prepared to go through thick and thin with France if France resolutely sided with Germany, it was too late. The German embassy had fought for this instruction from the very beginning of its mission. When, after the British attack on Admiral Gensoul's French squadron in Mers-el-Kebir, which violated international law, 1,400 French sailors who had died in battle were laid out in simple coffins on the beach, when General Dentz and his troops in Syria stood up to the attacking British, the German Embassy could have made the policy embodied in the Flitler Directive a success. However, when it turned out that the Berlin government was generous in taking, but less generous in giving, as it haggled over small reinforcements of its military position in the colonial empire desired by the French, and the embassy failed to obtain a binding declaration from Hitler on the matter, a binding declaration from Hitler on the future equal position of France in a new Europe and respect for the territorial integrity of France and its colonial empire, the man in the street in France, especially the patriotic French colonial officer in North Africa, did not have the certain feeling that fighting on the side of Germany was in the real interests of his fatherland.

Is the situation in Germany different today? Certainly, the overwhelming majority of all Germans do not want to become communist. But does the man in the street in Germany, especially those Germans who have heroically defied the onslaught of Bolshevism for years, have the secure feeling that they are fighting on the side of the West for the real interests of the German fatherland? The author of these introductory words may have it because, on the basis of his knowledge of the people and conditions in the Western countries, he believes he can have confidence in the healthy forces that are not lacking in England and also in France and

that are pressing forward with sober realism, especially in the United States, and advocating a new clear political course of unrestricted Western solidarity.

But is this trust to be demanded of the Germans, millions of whom were expelled from their homeland with the consent of the Western powers, thousands of whom were interned and hindered in their free activity because they belonged in good faith to a party that was in any case the only legal party in their country from 1933 to 1945, the workers and employees who saw their production facilities fall victim to senseless dismantling, the soldiers in particular, who were treated in an unworthy and dishonorable manner? Is this trust to be demanded of the families and friends of those who are still in prison today because they believed they had to do their duty loyally to their country at war, even though they did not agree with all the measures taken by the government but were unable to prevent them?

Do people in Germany and in Germany's western continental neighbors believe that the basic principle of democracy, respect for the constitution and the law, can be anchored by creating categories of citizens of inferior rights for reasons of revenge and hatred and to defend usurped positions? Can one seriously deny that among the collaborationists in our western neighbors there was an overwhelming majority of men who carried a European ideal in their hearts, without ceasing to be good patriots?

What are all these people of good will supposed to think when they are still being punished and downgraded for their ideals, the correctness of which is once again being attested to by today's governments?

Can one seriously speak of Franco-German understanding when one of the most convinced champions of this understanding, Otto Abetz, the Reich's ambassador in Paris during the war, is still being held in prison today? Nothing underlines the moral greatness of this man better than the fact that, despite the injustice done to him, he repeatedly - and now also in his book - calls on his German friends to hold on to the idea of the so bitterly needed Franco-German understanding. But do we not understand that the advertising power of this idea is severely impaired when the most loyal supporters of this idea can be confronted by suspicious compatriots? You see the receipt that Ambassador Abetz has received: Ingratitude is the

world's reward.

If Abetz and his friends are nevertheless not discouraged, it is because they have the happy certainty that their many French friends are just as loyal in their friendship as they themselves are and that the day will come when the political face of France will once again be shaped by these men.

May this day not come too late and may Stalin's alleged words not come true beforehand: "Europe is destroying itself". If the realization only comes when a joint train of captured resistance fighters and collaborationists from France, a transport of resistance fighters and so-called inciviques from Brussels, and old National Socialists and conspirators of July 20th 1944 from Germany march eastwards in joint cattle wagons to slave labour in the Urals or Siberia under the guard of mounted Cossacks, then it will be too late.

There is not much time left for the liberating decision. May Otto Abetz's book help to open the eyes of those who are still blind very soon.

Essen, January 1951

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Foreword

Mcmoir literature by men who have been in public life never flourishes more than after great wars and upheavals. The defeated commanders have an understandable need to justify themselves against the accusation of having committed strategic errors; the victors have a justified desire to bask in the triumph of their victory and to let some of its rays fall on the commanders and crews who contributed to it. The statesmen who led their country to defeat would like to wash themselves clean of guilt, remind their more fortunate colleagues in the victors' camp of their merits and admonish their peoples to manage the victory well.

After all, diplomats also like to take up their pens at such times. If

their country is defeated, they will prove that they advised against war. If their country was victorious, they will not place the same weight on this proof. On the one hand, they will of course have worked to maintain peace, but on the other hand they will not have neglected to give advice before the outbreak of war, which they owed to the honor and interests of their nation.

Military personnel and diplomats who claim to have deliberately worked towards the defeat of their fatherland have also been known. However, they were limited to Germany and the period after the Second World War and even then were probably only a temporary phenomenon. All the more common, on the other hand, are memoirists who plead not for themselves but for their people before the victorious nations and want to put them in a more favorable position abroad. Their opponents in the victorious countries, on the other hand, will leave no stone unturned to present their own cause as the only just one, and will attribute all violations of international law committed before and during the war to the defeated nations. Politicians, however, who are concerned about the relationship between their homeland and a neighboring country close to them beyond war and peace, will tend to pass one-sided judgment on third countries.

Memoirs by men who have been in public life can therefore never be completely colorless, despite the desire for historical objectivity. Even a limitation to bare facts does not exclude an unconscious bias in their selection. However, the subjective coloring of the material does not prevent such memoirs from nevertheless providing some factual information about the periods they deal with and thus contributing to the can contribute to a clearer understanding of national and international contexts.

The author represented the Reich as German Ambassador in Paris from June 1940 to August 1944. Prior to this official assignment, he had worked for five years in an official capacity as the French advisor to the Reich Youth Leadership and as an employee of the Reich Foreign Minister for French affairs. Finally, for several years before the National Socialist seizure of power, he had been privately involved in attempts at Franco-German understanding. His memoirs therefore cover both the French policy of the Third Reich and Franco-German relations under the Weimar

Republic.

When looking at recent Franco-German history, it is perhaps justified to assume that two almost simultaneous events dominated this period: the publication of "Mein Kampf" and the Locarno Conference. For two decades, German policy towards France was a story of conflict and the changing dominance of these tendencies. In 1933, Hitler triumphed domestically over the parties that had supported Stresemann's foreign policy. Conversely, however, the ideas of Locarno also triumphed over the concept of France in "Mein Kampf": from 1934 onwards, National Socialist Germany was no less eager to reach an understanding with France than the previous Weimar Republic. An overview of Franco-German relations over the last two decades must not fail to give these often overlooked and easily forgotten initiatives their rightful place.

German politicians expected Locarno to lead to an understanding with France and the gradual emergence of a quadripartite pact as a common platform for a new settlement of border relations in the East. For the Western powers, the Lake Maggiore agreement was only the prelude to a no less important "East Locarno", only the prelude to a voluntary German recognition of the entirety of the Versailles border demarcations. Stresemann's Locarno policy was bound to fail because of this divergence of views; under these circumstances, Hitler's "Locarno policy" could not even come to fruition.

If the Weimar Republic limited itself to continually avoiding a new voluntary recognition of Germany's eastern borders, the Third Reich proceeded to revise them by force. For a moment, in September 1938, it seemed as if the involvement of the Western powers in this process would eliminate its dangers for peace and establish a European forum based on the old Quadripartite Pact. However, Munich remained an episode and war broke out over the forcible revision of those provisions of the Treaty of Versailles which had always seemed to international public opinion to be most in need of revision: the Statute of Danzig and the Corridor.

Montesquieu laid down the principle of international law that the various nations should, as far as their interests permit, do each other as much good as possible in peace and as little harm as possible in war. The Treaty of Versailles deviated too much from this wise principle in peace for Hitler to be expected to make use of it in war.

But even after his victory in the Western campaign, Hitler did not actually return to the radical theses of "Mein Kampf". Nor, of course, did he return to a policy inspired by a genuine "Locarno spirit".

This was all the more regrettable as the war had been equally unpopular in Germany and France from the outset and after the armistice the French people had also shown a great, sincere willingness to come to an understanding. But it remained unused. Berlin and, above all, Rome left no stone unturned to make rapprochement with France more difficult. Montoire was no less sabotaged on the Spree and the Tiber than on the Thames.

The propaganda of the opponents of cooperation with Germany thus had an easy game among the French people, especially as it was no longer directed by London alone but also by Moscow from the beginning of the campaign in the East. With Berlin's political carte blanche, their combined efforts were to succeed in ending the Franco-German war, which had begun without hatred, in hatred.

Appointed "Representative of the Foreign Office to the Military Commander in Paris" on the day of the occupation of the French capital and "Representative of the Foreign Office to the Military Commander in France" at the beginning of August 1940, the author experienced this policy of missed opportunities at a point where he could see and regret it more than anywhere else.

This paper will therefore have no choice but to strongly criticize the Reich government and the Führer's headquarters. The political and moral errors committed by the National Socialist leadership are so serious that every German has a duty to get to the bottom of them in order to avoid repetition. However, the author does not wish to be among those who, like Napoleon's marshals, are the first to throw mud at a regime in which they have risen to high positions at a young age after its fall. My critical remarks will therefore remain within the framework of the criticism that I openly expressed towards the Führer and the Reich Foreign Minister even before the German collapse. I have personally experienced many good things from them and have personally experienced many bad things from them. My feelings of gratitude and my feelings of bitterness are sufficiently balanced so as not to endanger my freedom of judgment.

The reader may therefore be excused if the author has criticized

the Third Reich too harshly or, conversely, not harshly enough for his liking.

He may also be kindly indulged if factual errors have been made in this publication. I had to rely almost exclusively on my memory when writing the manuscript.

External circumstances meant that reference works were not available to me at all, and more recent publications and journals only in exceptional cases. For the war years I had the files of my trial at my disposal. However, they contained only a hundredth of the reports from my time as ambassador. Understandably, their selection was not made with the aim of providing a political overview of this period of Franco-German relations. As far as the years after the German collapse were concerned, I naturally lacked the documents. I only knew the state of the debate on the various issues involved from hearsay, and even then only in the rarest of cases. However, this lack may also have its advantages. It may benefit the impartiality of my impressions and memories.

It is not the intention of this publication to provide a complete "picture" of Franco-German politics over the last twenty years. Rather, it is a "picture sheet", an essay-like series of personal memories and reflections by a German who has been actively involved in the Franco-German question for two decades in various capacities and positions.

Despite the desire for the utmost objectivity in the depiction of past events, these memories and reflections also contain a confession. Beyond the vicissitudes of Franco-German relations, the author remains convinced that the hereditary enmity between the two peoples, if it ever rightly existed, must be consigned to history. The movements of millions of peace-loving front-line fighters in the First World War could not prevent the outbreak of the Second World War. The pioneers of Franco-German understanding faced too much resistance to be able to establish a policy of good neighborliness during the war. However, too many forces of good will were at work on both sides of the Rhine during this period for them to remain without effect in the long term.

There are still major moral obstacles between the two core peoples of the West. Injustice was followed by injustice during the German occupation of France, which was then followed by injustice by the French occupying power in Germany. The author will be just as frank about the mistakes committed by France as he was about

the abuses of the German government in his role as ambassador to the highest German authorities. Here too, however, he will emphasize the positive over the negative, the unifying over the divisive, to which his imprisonment as a "war criminal" in French dungeons could have given him cause.

"It will be possible to trace many individual nuances and contrasts between the peoples," says Jakob Burckhardt in his History of Renaissance Culture in Italy, "but human insight is too weak to draw the absolute sum of the whole. The great calculation of national character, guilt and conscience remains a secret one, if only because the defects have a second side, where they then appear as national qualities, even as virtues. Those authors who like to write general censures of peoples, sometimes in the strongest tones, must be allowed their pleasure. Western peoples can mistreat one another, but fortunately they cannot judge one another.

Fresnes, October 1950

Otto Abetz

Youth in the borderland

Anyone who has devoted himself to a cause and work in his later life to such an extent that they occupy the central position in it is easily prone to the self-deception of projecting such attachments back to his youth. Since the Franco-German question was at the center of my thoughts and actions from the age of twenty-five, there is a danger that I will attribute a similarly dominant role to it in my youth.

However, my childhood memories contain very little that could be related to France. I had already traveled to many foreign countries before I set foot on French soil for the first time. Nordic poetry and Eastern philosophies had occupied me much earlier than French literature and thought. My childhood love was Italy, and my decisive youthful experience was the German Wandervogel movement, whose mentality was quite the opposite of its western neighbor. It was only much later that I became aware that our national song, Eichendorff's "Nach Süden nun lenken", owed its melody to an old French hunting song. My image of France in my youth was therefore no different from that of many other young Germans of my generation.

But if - to use a technical term from psychoanalysis - you want to see "primal experiences" in early childhood impressions that influence later developments and decisions, then the decisive role of the Franco-German question in my life could perhaps be explained by my early borderland experience. I am from Baden. My ancestors on my father's side, as far back as they can be traced, come from the Alemannic parts of the country, the Black Forest. They had been resident in Rastatt as master wainwrights since the end of the seventeenth century. My maternal ancestors, foresters from generation to generation, have lived in the Baden and Hessian Odenwald since the Thirty Years' War and are all of Franconian origin. As with many south-west German border residents, the blood of two Germanic tribes mixes in my veins, one of which gave its name to France and the other - in French - to Germany.

I was born in Schwetzingen, a small district town near Mannheim, where I was born on March 26, 1903. As Margrave of Baden's Kentamtman, my father lived in the castle. My first impressions of life were the medieval moated castle, which was extended in the Baroque period, and the adjacent magnificent garden laid out in the Versailles style. The mighty

The lilac parterre in the castle courtyard, which smelled so unspeakably fragrant in June, the dark gate with the wrought-iron grille that led through the central building into the park, the wide chestnut avenues that lined the flowerbeds and the ponds with their water features, and then the large lake with the majestically positioned river deities, the secluded bosquets with the statues hidden in the greenery... All this probably gave the awakening senses a first, unconscious message of the "Grand Siede's" attempt to harmoniously marry art and nature; it might also have made me feel at home in his creations in France later on.

Schwetzingen and its palace also offered the young mind other impressions of its western neighbor. They are rich in memories of Liselotte von der Pfalz. According to literary tradition, Voltaire also gave the first version of parts of his "Candide" here. In more than one of her culturally informative letters, the "Palatine princess at the court of the

Sun King" expressed her homesickness for Schwetzingen and its beautiful palace park, and my native town repaid Liselotte's loyalty with the cult she deserved.

The Orleans War of Succession, which was tragically triggered by Liselotte's marriage, was also vividly remembered in Schwetzingen. When we children were allowed to take part in the hop-picking at a farmer's house in the small country town in the fall, many a piece of local history from oral tradition came to life in the stories told by old people. The memory of Melac and Louvois' command "brûlez le Palatinat" had become deeply engraved in the hearts of the people of this countryside. My childhood paradise was a gift of French gardening. But when I walked into the depths of the park, the blue ridge on which the ruins of Heidelberg Castle stood as a reminder became visible above the ponds and flower parterres.

In the sixth year of my life, my father was transferred to Karlsruhe as a domain councillor, and so I received my further youthful impressions in the Baden state capital. Here, too, there was no lack of French memories of various kinds. Above all, they were linked to Napoleon, as the first princess on the young grand ducal throne had been a Beauharnais, in whose honor one of the beautiful streets of the old residence is still called "Stephanienstrasse" today. The "Kriegstrasse", which cuts through the fan-shaped street network of the city center, also owes its name to the era of the Corsican. At the time, the townspeople laid it out outside the gates to divert the Napoleonic armies, which were allied but often made unwanted demands on the residents' possessions, from marching through the town. In 1812, the sizeable Baden contingent may well have joined the Russian "Grande Armee" campaign on this war route, which made a name for itself in various battles and also on the Berezina, eventually finding its way back home with only a few men. The regimental memorial of the Karlsruhe Life Guards, which was erected after the First World War, depicts

Names of glorious battles from 1870 and 1914, including those where Baden's citizens fought under Napoleon's banners.

In the palace gardens in Karlsruhe, however, Johann Peter Hebel's beautiful verses can be found on his memorial, in which the poet, who himself had long been a staunch supporter of Napoleon's party, took counsel with himself in the politically turbulent times in good Alemannic style:

"and if you're standing on the Chruezweg and
don't know where to go, keep still and ask
your knowledge, 's cha dütsch gottlob un
folgen sim Roth."

While some of the German tribes fought Napoleon as a tyrant, others, especially those in south-western Germany, saw him as the unifier of the West and the reviver of the Holy Roman Empire and the imperial glory of Charlemagne. Even today, pictures of the "Empereur" have a place of honor in Black Forest farmhouses, while the Bourbons and Jacobins are remembered by the border population only as troublemakers.

On our forays, we boys came across the so-called "Ettlenger Lines" in the forests south of Karlsruhe, earth fortifications that Margrave Ludwig von Baden, the conqueror of the Turks and teacher of Prince Eugene, had built to protect the empire against Christian France, which was allied with the Crescent.

And in the wider surroundings of the state capital, near the village of Sasbach at the foot of the Hornisgründe, stood the monument to Marshal Turenne until the beginning of the Second World War. The site was granted extraterritoriality in my youth and the guard was left to a French invalid. Baden liberalism knew how to honor a great military opponent, even if he had entered his native soil with less than peaceful intentions.

The visual lessons offered by the landscape, the traces of repeated military visits from the West that have been preserved in almost every town in Baden, shaped my view of history from a young age more than books. I was never convinced by the black-and-white picture popularized by certain French publicists and overzealous German adepts, who wanted to turn the French into a nation of peaceful farmers and petty bourgeois, but the Germans into a restless nation of warriors and conquerors. It may also be connected with these childhood and youthful impressions that in later years of political activity in France I got on relatively well with "Bonapartist" circles, but was never able to find a real bridge to the "royalists" of Action Française.

Of course, the experience of the First World War, which had the character of a Franco-German war in my city so close to the western border, was also very decisive for my political development.

Although I was still too young to take part in it, I was already old enough to think about it independently and gain lasting personal impressions. Even the day of mobilization remains vivid in my memory. Karlsruhe, the youngest of the major German cities, was preparing to celebrate the bicentenary of its foundation in 1915, and the Grand Duke and the city fathers had commissioned a considerable program of prestigious buildings for this commemorative year. From the windows of his parents' apartment in the margravian palace, the view fell on an open square where some of the largest of these building sites were located. When the mobilization posters were put up, I saw master builders, bricklayers and carpenters descend from their scaffolding, put down their tools and walk home thoughtfully. The buildings interrupted in the middle of the work were never to be completed.

When the first declarations of war became known on August 2, there were outbreaks of chauvinistic enthusiasm in some cities on both sides of the border, and the cries of "à Berlin" and "to Paris" were unending. In Karlsruhe, there was little sign of such jubilant patriotism. A huge crowd surrounded the editorial building of the "Badische Presse" and filled the adjacent market square. When the official announcement of the state of war was made, there was silence for a few minutes, as if in church. Then, sporadically, then in hundreds of voices and finally in a chorus of tens of thousands, the Deutschlandlied rose from the market square and streets to the sky. When the last verse had faded away, the crowd dispersed again in deep silence.

Images of splendor and victorious strength followed: the marching out of the Life Guards, flowers on helmets and shotgun barrels, the parade of the dragoon regiment, on horseback in brand new uniforms, a thousand flashes of bright steel lances with yellow-red flags under a bright blue August sky.

From the nearby Alsace front, where fierce fighting raged in the first days of the war, the thunder of cannons rumbled over. Soon the first trains of wounded arrived. As a garrison town, Karlsruhe also increasingly became a hospital town. The troops leaving for the front were loaded at the large new station; the wounded and injured on the battlefields

were brought to the old station, which had been closed down several years before the war. The park behind my parents' home bordered the old station square. I often saw paramedics and Red Cross nurses carrying long trains of seriously wounded people on stretchers out of the station hall and loading them into ambulances - a side of the war that was rarely revealed so clearly to civilians, especially young people, during the First World War.

The proximity to the front meant that Karlsruhe was also exposed to relatively frequent air raids. During an attack in the spring of 1915, my parents' house and the street in front of it were hit five times. And I can still see it before me today, how after the air raid on Corpus Christi Day 1916, the

The scene showed over fifty Karlsruhe children falling victim, stretchers of injured youngsters stunned by the air pressure being carried away, desperate mothers wandering among the long rows of children's corpses covered with cloths, searching for their missing boys and girls.

The commander of this air raid was the French journalist Henri de Kerilis. At the beginning of the 1930s, I once brought him to the editorial office of the "Echo de Paris" an invitation from the youth associations of my home town to lay a wreath on the graves of the victims of the air raid on June 21, 1916. This gesture would have shed a conciliatory light on a painful memory, but Henri de Kerilis did not find it. On the contrary, he became more and more cramped in his hatred of Germany and became one of the most active spokesmen for the French war party before the Second World War.

The Karlsruhe infanticide had a Parisian "counterpart". On Good Friday 1918, a shell from a German long-range gun hit a musical celebration for young people in the Saint-Gervais church. The writer Jacques Benoist-Mechin, who was injured, took a different path to Henri de Kerilis. He became one of the most chivalrous champions of Franco-German understanding and took a leading role in its realization after the armistice of 1940.

Compared to the mass murder of civilians and the war crimes committed on both sides of the warring parties during the Second World War, the bombing of the open city of Karlsruhe on Corpus Christi Day 1916 has little to say. Nevertheless, it left a deep impression on me. My hostility towards everything that leads to wars and unleashes human savagery in them may have stemmed not least from this childhood experience.

I was also encouraged in my growing opposition to the war by political influences. The Wandervogelbund, to which I belonged, was non-partisan and purely patriotic. However, from 1917 onwards, some North German leaders of the related "Freideutsche Jugend", who had been drafted into military service in Karlsruhe, increasingly paid homage to radical left-wing and international or, as it was called in these circles at the time, "inter-ethnic" tendencies. They did not remain without influence on the political world view of our developing years. So it was that in 1918, on the eve of the revolution, I was assigned, along with a few other boys from my league, to a group of young people who were to be sent to the surrounding villages on behalf of the food office after the revolution. The revolutionaries feared that the conservative peasants would no longer deliver food to the town that had gone into revolt. The sight of frighteningly emaciated schoolchildren was more effective than political propaganda and violence.

If my sympathies lay with the revolutionary left on the basis of these connections, one impression at the outbreak of the revolution was soon to alienate me deeply. It was the way in which the

revolutionaries confronted the front-line fighters. In the days that followed the fall of the old regime and until the arrival of the first front troops, groups of stage crews and questionable civilian elements gathered in the streets to tear off the rank insignia and war decorations of the officers and soldiers.

I had the opportunity to reflect on this in my own family. My father had volunteered to serve in 1914, but because he was over sixty years old, he was not able to serve at the front and had spent the war as a reserve captain in the army administration at home. He was brought home from the barracks by the men of his company on November 9, so that he remained unmolested. In the summer of 1918, my brother had been shot down as a young lieutenant pilot over the Western Front, was seriously wounded and brought home for medical treatment. He only narrowly escaped physical attacks when, on his way home from a training clinic to the officers' hospital in Karlsruhe, leaning on two crutches, he confronted one of the aforementioned rioters.

Similar scenes took place in many places in the empire at the time and turned quite a few Germans into enemies of the revolution who would have unreservedly agreed with its social goals. We boys were also caught up in such a contradiction. As the new era manifested itself in "councils", we had nothing more urgent to do than to found a "student council". Its first suggestion, however, was to have the middle and upper classes collect fir greenery in the forest and make garlands and welcome posters in the school building to decorate the station and Bahnhofstrasse for the armies returning from the front.

We were spontaneously anticipating a gesture that President Ebert would officially initiate a few days later in the Reich capital. Prince Max von Baden had entrusted him with the reins of government with the words: "I place the fate of a great nation in your hands". "I have sacrificed two sons for this people," was the new Reich President's reply. In Ebert's home town of Heidelberg, however, a Professor Gumbel believed he had to speak of the "fallen on the field of dishonor" at a university memorial ceremony in the final years of the Weimar Republic. In doing so, he did a disservice to the idea of peace and only succeeded in making the citadel of German democracy the first major city in the Reich to elect a National Socialist majority to the town hall.

Opposition to war can certainly be combined with reverence for military greatness, and front-line fighters who were defeated after a heroic struggle deserve even more affectionate reverence from their homeland than front-line fighters who were granted the satisfaction of victory.

The fact that we raved in youthful exuberance about socialist peace among nations and world brotherhood did not prevent us from rushing out of class on a rainy morning in 1919 and watching with burning eyes as the last front troops marched off in a solemn procession to collect the flags of the Baden regiments from the palace to take them home. to safety outside the demilitarized zone. If in my later political activity I made a strong and successful effort to have the front-line fighters not as opponents but as allies of the youth, these experiences of my formative years may have been decisive in my subconscious.

The French occupation, which the armistice and the Treaty of Versailles brought with it for a large part of West Germany, only extended to a few bridgeheads in Baden. One Sunday morning, my Wandervogel group had chosen the streetcar stop at Karlsruhe's Rhine harbor as the meeting point. A few dozen Negroes who had just been imported from

Africa were quartered in the barracks close by. Whether it was because the sons of the jungle were not yet able to tell the difference between adolescence and adulthood in white people, or because our uniform dress made us look like soldiers in their eyes: when our troop was ready to march, they suddenly formed up into a veritable storm attack and surrounded us with bayonets at the ready, uttering unintelligible sounds of nature. Despite the lack of linguistic communication, it was clear that they wished us away from this place, especially as they emphasized this wish by firing their pistons. Bricks were piled up along the harbor road. Switching from close-range to long-range combat, our black guests achieved throwing distances that we could not deny our sporting appreciation.

How out of place the colored occupation troops were in Germany was particularly evident in the winter months. I remember a Negro guard on the Rhine bridge at Maxau, whose crew, despite several woolen scarves wrapped around their steel helmets, looked down into the ice chattering and could hardly hold their rifles because of the cold. With the cruelty of youth, we threw off our clothes in front of them and swam a few strokes between the ice floes of the raging river, just like Tacitus. We gladly accepted the wintry dip just to feast our eyes on how the sons of the hot continent were shaken with terror. I have never forgotten the gnashing of teeth of the Negroes transplanted to the unfamiliar northern climate. When, as ambassador in 1941, I learned that tens of thousands of French black prisoners of war were being held in camps in Germany and were already suffering from serious diseases, I campaigned and succeeded in having them all released and transported back to their African homeland.

The impressions I received from French culture in my last years at school have remained less in my memory. I don't remember being anywhere near as moved by the great French classics as I was by reading the *Odyssey*, Shakespearean dramas or even German *1)ichter*. But as luck would have it with the impressions of my youth, the "*Lettres de mon Moulin*", which I read in one of the middle classes, appealed to me immensely. The story of the miller who doesn't want to have his say, "let his mill have nothing more to grind, left me with a human impression.

and the story of the prefect who falls under the spell of the forest on a business trip made me realize the musicality of the French language for the first time. Even today, the birdsong and the murmur of the spring with which Alphonse Daudet embellishes his little idyll still ring in my ears from that school morning.

Our history lessons were excellent. He tried to give us an understanding of the great connections in the life and development of nations without boring memorization. In the oral examination, I was asked to comment on Robespierre's relationship with Rousseau. However, judging by the faces of the examination board, my answer did not reveal any in-depth knowledge and certainly no personal interest in the subject in question.

The first French book I read of my own free will was Romain Rolland's "*Mahatma Gandhi*". But even then, it wasn't the author but the subject matter that appealed to me. The apostle of "non-violence" cast such a spell over me that I set off with a rucksack and a few marks in my pocket to become his disciple. But the journey to India on foot turned out to be a little too far. The political path I later traveled from admirer of Mahatma Gandhi to ambassador of Adolf Hitler was not exactly short either.

Tolstoy's ideas also had an effect on me in those years. Like every self-respecting wanderer, I naturally also "settled" once. The experiment did not remain without influence

on my later political development. I got to know the hard and beautiful work on the land from my own experience and understood its static function in the life of the people. The insight into a perfect community of production and goods, however, sharpened my feeling for the individual limits that are imposed on the socialization of individual districts even under the most ideal conditions.

This time also influenced my further development to the extent that I decided on a course of study. A country school was set up in connection with the settlement on Lake Constance, where I was to teach art alongside my work in agriculture. I therefore enrolled on the drawing teacher courses at the Karlsruhe School of Art and continued this training even when the estate was no longer being run.

When I entered the Badische Landeskunstschule, I increasingly came into contact with French culture. My teacher, the academy professor Ernst Würtenberger, was a pupil of Hans Thomas, Arnold Böcklin and Ferdinand Hodler and himself an unadulterated Alemannic. His woodcut illustrations for Gottfried Keller's novellas and the "Poor Man in Toggenburg" achieved a power of expression and a righteousness rarely seen in German graphic art since the Middle Ages. His fanaticism for linear style and orderly pictorial composition made Ernst

Würtenberger become an admirer of French art, whose traditional formal rigor continues to influence the most modern of her creations. Würtenberger was particularly fond of Ingres. He dedicated a very interesting treatise to him from a technical point of view, for the illustrations of which he translated compositions by the great French master into woodcuts with his own hand. Naturally, Würtenberger passionately rejected Ingres' opponent, Delacroix, who worked purely from color. I thus became familiar in a very direct way with the two French schools, whose contrast has dominated and enriched the art of our western neighbor from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day.

I owe my academic introduction to the world of French architecture to the lectures of the art historian Professor Waltzinger, especially the introduction to the world of French cathedrals. I had grown up in the German youth movement, which, despite all its modern and reformist ideas, also had many romantic, backward-looking traits and whose attitude to life was - to use a buzzword of the time - "Gothic". She felt more at home in the Middle Ages of knightly orders and craftsmen's guilds, travelling scholars and mystery plays than in the mechanization of the twentieth century. Between South Tyrol and the Baltic, between the Bernese Oberland and Flanders, there was hardly a castle, a cathedral or an old town that this youth would not have explored and idolized. Like the young Goethe in his hymn "Von deutscher Art und Art" ("Of German Art and Art") set to music by Strasbourg Cathedral, they equated Germanness with Gothic and contrasted both with a "Welsh" spirit and character. The great sites of the medieval empire had also become shrines to me on my many travels through my homeland, both near and far, and the Gothic style seemed to me to be the ultimate expression of Germanness.

But now art history taught me that, alongside the Germany of cathedrals and castles, there was a France of cathedrals and palaces that was no less enchanting; that the soaring Gothic style was characteristic of both peoples, indeed that it had even originated in France and from Normandy and the Ile de France had begun its triumphal march across the entire north of Europe. I saw an arc between Mont Saint-Michel and the Marienburg, the

north-western and north-eastern outposts of an Occident which, despite many fratricidal quarrels and local feuds, was united in its attitude to life, in which the Germanic tribes held the "imperium", Paris the "Studium" and Rome the "sacerdotium". I realized that the greatest sculpture of the Germans, the horseman in Bamberg Cathedral, was of one blood and one spirit with his royal counterpart in Reims Cathedral, that citizens who towered such enormous church halls to the heavens still spoke a common language of the heart.

Art history also taught me the frequently emphasized difference between the two peoples in their relationship to "Latinity" in a new light

nchen. I Lilien Mil, did not German artists, the masters of the Kölner Bauhütte, stand up in the thirteenth century to defend the Latin tradition against the "barbaric" Gothic innovation advancing from France? Certainly, the marriage between north and south had always been more harmonious in the geographically fortunate France than in Germany, which was separated from the Mediterranean world by the Alpine Wall. But could not a meeting of German and French minds become all the more fruitful as a result, and Germany find natural complements in the more formal France, France in the more formal Germany? Was Balzac's novel not animated as much by Nordic as by Latin genius? Had French poetry not achieved a musicality in the verses of the Symbolists that was essentially akin to German Romanticism? Wasn't "Le Grand Meaulnes" also written from the soul of the youth on the other side of the Rhine? Hadn't Aristide Maillol also rediscovered the great form for a young generation of German sculptors?

During my years of study at the Baden Academy of Art, I also came into closer contact with French literature. Like many relatively small German cities, Karlsruhe had a very lively intellectual life that was not very conspicuous to foreigners, the likes of which can usually only be found in capital cities abroad. Therefore, when the Karlsruhe youth movement later took up the competition for cultural understanding with the young generation of France, it was perhaps not too daring an undertaking that it competed - to use the language of sport - as a "city team" against a "national team".

One of the most intellectually active circles was grouped around the Karlsruhe literary historian Adolf von Grolman, whose personal friendship and reading evenings during these years were the decisive factor in broadening and deepening my view of France. A scholar of Hölderlin and Stifter, he also felt strongly attracted to Western culture and, as is often the case with German scholars, had a reverence for the easier French way of life that bordered on enthusiasm. It was at this time that Spengler's "Decline of the West" occupied people's minds and inspired them to take stock of Europe's remaining cultural possibilities.

I had grown fond of ancient Athens and Renaissance Florence on my travels and study trips. Even before I got to know Paris from my own experience, I already suspected that these two cities lived on in it. Certainly Greece did not end in Athens, and Florence was not the whole of Italy. But Attic and Tuscan spirituality and grace had radiated a magic beyond their time without which European culture would be inconceivable, just as Paris could not be imagined without it. The fact that Paris had also remained a place of pilgrimage for the German spirit was shown by the close relationship that Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke, the most celebrated poets in the German youth movement, had found with this city.

But this Paris was not only the city of Mallarmé and Rodin, but also the city of Clemenceau and Poincaré. The city from which the Versailles Treaty, the invasion of peace, the demands for reform that contradicted all economic reason had emanated. The city in which a painting of Karlsruhe hung above the divan in Henri de Kerilis' don, whose dedication plaque kept alive the memory of the air raid of June 21, 1916. Was German youth allowed to see Paris through the eyes of Stefan George and Rainer Maria Hilke, while Negroes stood on the Rhine, while the tricolor fluttered over the old imperial city of Speyer and the homeland of Baden lay unprotected in the I < ucr range of French cannons?

The curse and blessing of a neighborhood stood out to the maturing I hicil in just as sharp a contrast as in childhood. There was hardly a castle, church, monastery, aristocratic palace or patrician house in the vicinity of my birthplace that had not been burned and devastated by French soldiers. In my immediate and wider Rhenish homeland, however, there was hardly a religious or secular building of note that did not owe the clarity of its structure and the richness of its decoration to France. All my hatred was for the France of violence, all my love for the France of the spirit. My study of art and my literary inclinations may have been responsible for the fact that I gave priority to the spirit over violence.

I began to see politics as a time-dependent, changeable phenomenon and culture as a timeless and timelessly obligatory phenomenon. From then on, the experience of the cultural community of the two countries also determined my attitude towards the political problems of their neighborhood. And the words of Romain Rolland in "Jean Christophe à Paris" gained greater power over me than any slogans of hatred: "Germany and France are the two wings of the West - whoever paralyzes one, disturbs the flight of the other."

The Sohlberg circle

After passing the state examination for the artistic teaching profession at the Badische Landeskunstschule, I was employed at the grammar school in the state capital in the fall of 1927. A few days after I took up my post, during a break in my lessons, a professor at the school, who headed a youth movement, made the surprising announcement that the working group of Karlsruhe youth associations had unanimously elected me as its chairman the previous evening.

I had no longer been in direct contact with the youth movement in the last few years of my studies, but I still felt an inner affinity with it. So I accepted the choice that had been made for me.

Like the corresponding umbrella organizations in other German cities in the period after the First World War, the "Working Group of Karlsruhe Youth Associations" also comprised groups of all political and ideological persuasions. Its more than 40 associations belonged to the German Nationalist, Social Democratic, Democratic, People's Party, Communist and National Socialist, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Free Religious as well as politically and denominationally neutral youth movements; some student associations and youth organizations of various trade unions were also represented in it.

This "youth parliament" had a spacious municipal youth center with lecture halls and rooms for the next evenings of the individual groups. It held on to its joint events and its forms of mutual understanding even when the political differences in Germany had already become very acute. In Karlsruhe at the beginning of the 1930s, for example, an evening rally of two thousand young people of all political persuasions with their various pennants, badges and uniforms took place in front of the same town hall where a meeting of the city fathers had ended in the afternoon with a melee between the left-wing and right-wing parties and the smashing of the furniture.

The activities of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde" were aimed at the then usual areas of activity of the German youth movement, the organization of debate evenings, cooperation in the youth hostel work, the expansion of leisure legislation for young workers, the cultivation of folk song, folk dance and amateur dramatics through inter-allied singing and dancing circles and play groups.

I was of the opinion that the border location of the Baden state capital gave the Karlsruhe Youth Ring a task of a very special kind and importance.

ccit: contact and discussion with the young generation in France. My view was shared by all the youth associations in the Karlsruhe working group, and I was given the task of establishing the appropriate links with the French youth organizations and inviting them to a joint meeting in the Black Forest.

The date chosen for this meeting was the shortest date after the evacuation of the Rhineland by the French occupying forces, the summer vacations of 1930; the location was a western peak of the mountain range, the Sohlberg, which towers high above the Rhine plain.

Around one hundred representatives of youth and student organizations from both countries accepted the invitation to the Sohlberg conference. Like the German participants, the French participants also belonged to the most diverse political and ideological camps. Young "Action Francaise", "Jeunesses Patri- otes" and Hervejugend alternated with "Jeunesses Radicales", members of the League of Nations Youth and the "Ligue d'Action Republicaine et Socialiste" as well as supporters of the Second and Third

Internationals. A "Groupement Universitaire Franco-Allemand", founded at the Sorbonne especially for this purpose, was responsible for organizing them.

While every Frenchman found politically and ideologically aligned German partners, the German and French delegations as a whole were as different from each other as possible in terms of their lifestyles. Without exception, the German participants came from the youth movement. The French participants, with the exception of a few Catholic and Protestant scout leaders, were characterized by the political and literary salons of Paris.

A decidedly more "German" and a typically more "French" youth could not have met; and this contrast was not the least of the conference's attractions.

The Sohlberg meeting was held in the large youth hostel built on the summit of the mountain and recently inaugurated in the presence of Reich Chancellor Wirth. From its bright day room with its wide windows and from the open expanse of the river in front of the building, the view stretched far out over the Rhine plain, in which the river made its silvery loop in front of the silhouette of Strasbourg Cathedral, while the heights of the Vosges greeted its sister mountain range from a blue distance.

We Germans, who thought we had a feeling for nature, were quite surprised at how strongly and spontaneously our French comrades felt the beauty of this landscape. They stood spellbound on the slope of the plateau towards the Rhine valley or gazed in amazement at the mountain world of the Black Forest, which opened up to the eye to the east with its twilight waves of fir crowns.

But the catastrophe was to come with the food. The German participants had at least acquired enough knowledge of French table manners to be able to visit the baker in the nearest village, three hours away.

chcns had given up delivering a trolley of white bread every morning. But the usual youth hostel stew was still on the menu. When, after the very impressive welcoming speeches accompanied by chamber music - during which a rainbow had dutifully appeared over the Rhine plain - the first meal was served, the long, white-rubbed tables decorated with flowers were laden with bowls of steaming noodle soup and a glass of fresh drinking water in front of each guest's seat. In the face of this spartan menu, a commotion arose among the French participants that could give a small idea of their great revolution. There was a mass exodus to the valleys, where the spa hotels offered sumptuous meals, and the afternoon and evening lecture program had to be postponed until the following day. However, an agreement with the warden and the warden's mother brought the menu for the following days into line with the requirements of the French palates, which was certainly not to the detriment of the Germans either.

The conference program was quite broad: "The political, economic, social, cultural and religious situation of Germany and France and the special position of the young generation in it." Cross-sections through the most important areas of life in the two neighbouring countries were first of all intended to familiarize participants with their peculiarities and awaken an understanding of their differences, but then also to show the extent to which young people in both countries faced similar problems.

The German lectures were mainly given by academics, including the Karlsruhe art historian Dr. Kurt Martin, the Heidelberg sociologist Arnold Bergsträsser and the professor of architecture at the Baden Technical University, Professor Spannhake; on the French side, the speakers were mostly politicians and freelance writers. They had their intellectual center in Jean Luchaire and his weekly magazine "Notre Temps", which was close to Briand and supported by him. Jean Luchaire had caught my attention through his 1929 publication "Une generation réaliste", in which he put forward numerous ideas that

were also valid for young Germany; when I invited the Parisian youth and student organizations to a conference in the Black Forest in the spring of 1930, it was he who gave me the warmest approval and most active support for this initiative.

The French writer Alfred Silbert, who had taken part in the meeting in the Black Forest, but who ten years later became one of the first "resistants", made the following statement in 1949 at my trial before the Paris Military Tribunal, when asked to testify about the attempts at communication during the Sohlberg period: "Like many journalists of all political persuasions, I was then a contributor to a magazine called 'Notre Temps', which was directed by Jean Luchaire. You could say that between 1928 and 1930, everyone who has any kind of name in the press, politics and literature today contributed to this magazine, which was called the 'Revue des jeunes generations europeennes' called." Jean Luchaire fell as a "collaborateur" under the bullets of a firing squad of the "Haute Cour de Justice" in 1946 because he believed he still had to serve the idea of understanding when the roles of victors and vanquished had been reversed between Germany and France. Europe is not very economical with its elites.

But more about that later. Let's look back to 1930 and the Sohlberg, where Jean Luchaire dominated the discussion with his winning, clear voice at the lectern in the large lecture hall of the youth hostel or under the free-standing fir tree on the camp site.

After the speeches and debates of the official program, there were hours in which people sat in small groups in front of the tents and at the edge of the forest and continued to discuss the topics they had begun in personal conversations. These young people had much to tell each other: about the plight of Germany and its daily growing unemployment, about the struggle of the young French against the old generation incapable of any European thinking, which put the greatest difficulties in the way of Briand's far-sighted policy, about the French need for security, about the possible modalities of a revision of the most intolerable provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, about educational and school issues, about church problems, about art and science.

As everywhere where young people are together, there was no shortage of human relationships, and many a black-eyed Yvonne from Provence and many a blonde Yvette from Paris made friends with a Hans or Fritz on lonely Black Forest paths, and vice versa.

The end of the conference was approaching. A huge pile of wood was brought together and lit in the evening as the first stars rose in the night sky. The national anthems rang out, speakers summarized the results of the meeting once again and pledged on behalf of the participants that they would not let the work they had begun rest until the entire young generation of the two countries, and through them the German and French people, had found the way to a lasting and genuine understanding.

In the light of the burning fire, an amateur dramatics group of Heidelberg students performed Romain Rolland's "The Burghers of Calais".

The next morning brought the separation, the departure for home. A departure full of hope.

The next conference took place in Rethel in the Ardennes in August 1931. In the meantime, young people on both sides of the Rhine had not been idle. In Paris, the participants of the Sohlberg meeting had founded a "Comite d'Entente de la Jeunesse Francaise pour le rapprochement franco-allemand", in which organizations of the most diverse tendencies were represented with a total of 150,000 members. The Karlsruhe "Sohlberg Circle" had also expanded its ranks and made contact with the "Reichsausschuß Deutscher Jugendverbände" (Reich Committee of German Youth Associations), which had millions of members and whose chairman, together with numerous other youth leaders from the Reich to take part in the meeting in Rethel.

Like the Sohlberg conference, the meeting in Rethel also featured lectures and discussions on all current political and cultural problems in the two countries and their impact on neighborly relations. The French government had made the state agricultural college available, whose lecture halls, dormitories and dining rooms provided a suitable and hospitable setting for the meeting.

Rethel, which again suffered badly during the Second World War, was completely destroyed by fire in 1914 after being conquered by German troops. It was therefore a risk to hold the event in this very town. How would the population receive the young Germans? The concern proved to be unfounded. It became true once again that people who have themselves endured the most severe suffering are often the least inclined to inflict the same on others out of a desire for revenge, but rather show a great willingness to do their part so that at least in the future there will be less suffering among the people. The inhabitants of Rethel, including ordinary men and women from the people, attended the lectures and discussions at the conference in such numbers that the rooms often could not hold the guests. The closest contacts, however, were made at the song and folk dance evenings. "In the lectures and discussions," said a guest from the city, "we got to know Germany, but in your songs and dances we learned to love it."

Conversely, the personal contacts with the inhabitants of Rethel also gave us Germans some interesting insights into the life and thinking of a population that had suffered more than others during the war. Invitations to country estates in the neighborhood, a visit to the city of Reims with its cathedral, which had not yet been restored at the time, and the conciliatory but serious welcoming speeches by some maires at receptions in town halls in Champagne and the Ardennes deepened these impressions.

No matter how much the official theses of Parisian propaganda about the guilt of the Franco-German wars contradicted the objective truth, the population of these departments had experienced at first hand that "three times in one year a hundred German invasions devastated the country", that "three times in one year a hundred German invasions devastated the country", and here the term "lacurite" was not an abstract political catchphrase, but the same profile could have different effects depending on whether one looked at it from one side of the border or the other. The tireless Scimilimiu n St msemanns had finally succeeded in ensuring that in 1930 the still occupied zone of the Rhine in Lindes tunt fahre before the Treaty of Versailles f< stgclgctcii Tc ei l amiiit winde. I)ic relaxation hoped for from this, however, remained to us I > l . dcuisc fic Volf, < mpland not so much the years that the Rhineland before d' l - ' 11 p. laiimt uind< . as the years that had elapsed between the first announcements - l< l R mmmii' and tim m l ii . ic hhc execution. The French al "i, which you ■ polit is h<gesture demanded since Locarno, and finally accepted it against

The German reactions must have been perceived as ingratitude. Even our friends in Rethel did not conceal from us their dismay at the anti-French demonstrations on the occasion of the liberation celebrations and the visit that Hindenburg had paid to the Rhineland immediately after the evacuation.

Hindenburg, who had already appeared to the world as a kind of loyal cornerstone of German democracy and European peace in the presidential elections of 1932, had been the epitome of the German threat of war to the French just a year earlier. Hitler, whose party had entered the Reichstag with a larger parliamentary group for the first time after the September elections of 1930, had received far less attention. However, regardless of the banners under which he rallied, German nationalism marched inexorably forward. Young people were also flocking to it. Reason enough for the Rethel conference to deal with this serious fact, its causes and possible effects.

A no less significant phenomenon was the simultaneous growth of the communist

movement in Germany. I can still clearly see the chairman of the "Reich Committee of German Youth Associations", Hermann Maaß, who personally belonged to the majority Social Democratic Party, during one of the heated debates in Rethel, when he believed that the French interlocutors did not sufficiently understand the German difficulties. "There's also Russia for us," he explained excitedly. Whereupon the young deputy from Charleville and later Under-Secretary of State in the Popular Front government, Pierre Vienot, jumped up from his seat and exclaimed no less excitedly: "C'est du chantage". Pierre Vienot had begun his political career as secretary of the "Mayrisch Committee", which sought Franco-German economic understanding, and died in exile in London during the Second World War as a supporter of de Gaulle. Hermann Maaß was executed after July 20, 1944 as a leading member of the German resistance movement, but I do not know whether he had belonged to its Moscow or England-oriented wing.

In any case, the era of Franco-German rapprochement, which Stresemann and Briand had shaped, came to an end in 1931. Stresemann had died shortly after his successful evacuation of the Rhineland. Briand was still alive. The old "pelerin de la paix" still remained a symbol and role model for conspiratorial friends of peace. A visit to him had been planned for a larger group of conference participants after Rethel, but it could not take place due to Briand's illness. In the Chamber and in French public opinion, however, his name no longer had the old ring to it.

The situation on both sides of the Rhine had come to a head, the concern on one side and the need on the other had become too great for attempts at middle solutions to be predicted to last much longer. Jacques Bainville's prophetic words: "Versailles is too harsh for what it contains in terms of mildness, too mild for what it contains in terms of harshness", proved more and more true from day to day. Thus the Rethel meeting, which had been extremely rich in cultural and personal contacts, ended with a big question mark in purely political terms. Could a good German renounce the claim to equal rights of his people, could a good Frenchman renounce his right to security? Did the happiness and greatness of one fatherland exclude the happiness and greatness of the other once and for all? Was there no room in Europe for the development of two strong, self-confident and economically prosperous states? The young generation, too - indeed, it was precisely the young generation that felt the inevitability, the tragedy and danger of this question because of the honest sympathies that had already formed between them across the borders. A third meeting, at Easter 1932 in Mainz, was to provide the answer.

As on the Sohlberg and in Rethel, a great deal of attention was paid to the cultural heritage and the comparison of contemporary intellectual life in Mainz. In the stone halls and corridors of the old citadel, an exhibition of young French painters and a show of modern German painting and graphics took place, for which studios and museums had provided the best works. Carefully arranged book exhibitions showed several hundred exquisite samples of German and French literature, which the youth recommended to their neighbors for translation as the most characteristic contemporary expression of their country's literary will and ability. Young musicians familiarized visitors with their own works and the creations of their contemporary masters. Among them, as well as among the exhibiting artists and the poets represented in the book show, there were quite a few who would later make a name for themselves in German and French intellectual life.

But the real dominant feature of the Mainz conference was nevertheless the political debate, the clash of nationalisms. For the first time, right-wing extremists, French fascists, young supporters of the "Action Francaise", conservative Barresian Catholics and National Socialist students took an active part in the presentations and debates on both sides.

In the large ceremonial room of the Mainz Citadel, where the lectures and debates took place, conference participants had pinned a powerful poster by the Parisian graphic artist Colin to the wall between two pillars: in the lower half, a mother, horror in her eyes, bent protectively over her two children, while the entire upper half of the picture was taken up by a huge aerial bomb hurtling down on the defenceless. The text of the artistically impressive poster admonished the people to disarm. Leaders of the Herve Group who arrived at the conference demanded the immediate removal of this "provocation to pacifism."

This put us right in the middle of the topic. As some lecturers at the nearby Frankfurt university, which was decidedly left-wing, including Jewish professors who had come to the debates, there was no lack of advocates of opposing theses. The divine origin of the nation and the people, the recognition and rejection of the nation and belonging to a nation as the highest moral value, the interrelationships between the individual, the nation and humanity were the topics of discussion, which were sometimes dealt with academically, sometimes in less academic forms.

A National Socialist student leader took to the stage. He spoke of Moeller van den Bruck - who had not yet been placed on the index of the official party examination commission at the time - glorified intuition in Ludwig Klages' train of thought and concluded with a fierce attack against the "raison d'être" that had brought the French spirit to power in the world, drying up and destroying all real life. "Even if the French", replied the Belgian socialist leader Hendrik de Man, then a university lecturer in Frankfurt, "may have placed reason on the altar of Notre-Dame in 1792 as a naked harlot, she is and remains a great goddess".

Domestic ideological passions were so strong even among the participants in the Mainz conference, who had come together of their own free will and as "people of good will", that they sometimes broke down the natural national unity fronts. At the wreath-laying ceremony in Stresemann's memorial hall, which the city of Mainz had had erected a few months earlier, there were almost only representatives of left-wing associations on both the French and German sides. Conversely, the extremists of the right came together surprisingly quickly in their common battle position against the respective internal enemy, the "pacifists" and "cosmopolitans", and many a person who had only recently spoken only of the "boche" and "negro France" suddenly began to at least enthuse about the "nationalist" of the fatherland, the "patriotic" German and the "patriotic French". The Third Reich cast its shadow ahead.

Barres' myth of "La Terre et les Morts" undoubtedly contained similarities to the National Socialist myth of "blood and soil". But did they provide usable foundations for a reorganization of Franco-German relations? After the failure of Geneva and the democratic unification efforts, could salvation be expected from an "International of Nationalists"? Or was the economy called upon to remind the European states of the solidarity of their interests in view of the daily increase in unemployment figures and the progressive loss of all national assets?

Probably the most impressive presentations at the Mainz meeting were devoted to areas that lie outside the political and social issues of the day, but are of crucial importance for their peaceful and just resolution: the bonds of religion - and the dictates of conscience. The Catholic professor from the University of Bonn, Alois Dempf, appealed to the Christian heritage of the West and developed the order of the medieval empire presented such a clearly structured and powerful picture that he captivated all listeners. And Franz Piper, professor of theology in Münster, used the ethical rigor of Protestantism to condemn human nature, whose inclination towards evil always makes wars possible;

however, man is always under the commandment of love and is called upon by his conscience to continually fight for peace.

Through the power of their intellectual structure and their profound moral seriousness, these two lectures may have left many conference participants with lasting impressions of the Mainz meeting at Easter 1932.

From the summer of 1932 onwards, I had a very close family connection with France: Suzanne de Bruyker, whom I had met as secretary of "Notre Temps" at the Rethel conference, married me in Karlsruhe on September 1. When, during the First World War, she traveled on a Kindertransport from her home in Lille through the Baden region to reach Switzerland via Schaffhausen, she would certainly never have believed that she would one day walk down the aisle with a German in this country.

During the Christmas vacations of 1932, we took part together in the Franco-German ski camp, which had been organized every winter in the Black Forest since the Sohlberg meeting and which always enjoyed a large number of visitors from both countries. When the French participants returned home at the beginning of January, we rendez-voused in Paris, where the fourth annual meeting of the Sohlberg Circle was scheduled for Easter.

I was surprised by the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the seizure of power by National Socialism in Karlsruhe, if "surprised" is not too strong an expression. Even before the change of regime officially took place in the southern German states, hotheads had hoisted the swastika flag on the castle tower in Karlsruhe. When a colleague pointed this out to me on my way home from work, I replied: "That flag won't make it far into the museum one day". I was wrong, the Karlsruhe Palace, which housed the Baden State Museum, was also to fall victim to the Second World War.

A few days after March 5, 1933, commissioners from the new government announced their attendance at a meeting of the "Working Group of Karlsruhe Youth Associations". As chairman of the working group, my position as a trustee in relation to the politically and ideologically diverse associations had imposed complete neutrality on me. When allocating rooms in the youth center and participating in joint events, I had looked after the interests of the Hitler Youth just as impartially as those of any other group. Nevertheless, I was not surprised that the National Socialist commissioners told me at the "Gleichschaltungs" meeting of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde" that I did not enjoy the trust of the new government, and half-uttered expressions such as "pacifist" and "Frenchman". So I was dismissed. My last "official act" consisted of me agreeing to the expulsion of the representative of the Protestant youth associations. As a passionate supporter of the religious socialists, this youth pastor had made himself so unpopular with the new rulers by attacking the Baden Gauleiter during the election campaign that they had demanded his immediate removal from the hall.

The "Sohlbergkreis" was organizationally anchored in the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde", but its sphere of activity extended across the entire Reich. I therefore took the view that my dismissal from the leadership of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde" did not affect the leadership of the Sohlbergkreis, which was in my hands, and continued this activity unchanged. In particular, I made preparations for the Franco-German youth conference that had been arranged for Easter 1933 in Paris.

This decision led to my first armed conflict with the Foreign Office. At the end of March, I received a written summons to Wilhelmstrasse to discuss the planned meeting. So I set off from "Potsdam in Baden", which the postmarks had been designating my home town as for a few days, to Berlin, which I politely referred to as "Karlsruhe in Mark Brandenburg".

In Wilhelmstraße I was received by the youth officer of the cultural department, a kindly old gentleman who had been a consul in France for a long time and whose language had retained a slight accent of his Württemberg homeland. Hanging above his desk was not the usual picture of the Führer in all offices, but a large photograph of Count Zeppelin.

The opening he gave me was less uplifting: the Foreign Office had always followed the work of the Sohlberg Circle with sincere sympathy and welcomed the continuation of such initiatives. However, it was not yet clear whether these would be in line with the new Reich government, and I was therefore advised to cancel the Paris Easter Conference. - I replied that the Sohlberg Circle would attend the meeting in Paris unless we were prevented from doing so by force, and even then we would try to cross the border illegally.

The friendly official then took me to his immediate superior, to whom I gave the same explanation. He passed me on to higher and higher levels in the ministerial hierarchy. The distinguished diplomatic faces, immobile in their facial expressions, with their intellectuality intact, before which I passed in review, were of such a uniform type that, like an ethnographer on his first encounter with a foreign people, I was unable to record any individual features. The rooms impressed themselves better on my memory. If these were still reserved for the same ranks in the years of my later official relations with the Foreign Office, the last office I reached could almost have been that of a Secretary of State. But here, too, I stuck firmly to my rebellious opinion, earning a shrug of the shoulders that straddled the middle ground between benevolence and

The Foreign Office was surprised: "We cannot prevent you from doing what you want to do, but it has never happened before that a private individual has acted against a recommendation of the Foreign Office in such a case".

The Sohlberg Circle therefore traveled to the Easter conference in Paris exclusively on its own responsibility; of course, only those of its loyal members who still had passports with visas from the time of the Weimar Republic. We crossed the border in Kehl without any difficulty and were welcomed like animals on our arrival.

It was only the personal stay in the foreign capital that made it possible to fully appreciate the tremendous change in mood that the National Socialist seizure of power had triggered here. The modest group of German conference participants and their French interlocutors became the subject of press polemics that left nothing to be desired in terms of vehemence.

Circles that had been committed to understanding with Germany all those years suddenly became the bitterest opponents of any Franco-German contact and openly propagated preventive war. Others, who had always been bitter Germanophobes, changed sides no less suddenly. They suddenly embraced the policy of good neighborliness.

As confusing as this made the situation, especially for a foreign observer, it did allow certain general conclusions to be drawn. The circles on the left had not secretly given up their traditional sympathies for Germany, but had given themselves over to an unrestrained hatred of National Socialism. The circles of the right continued to hate Germany in their hearts, but to a certain extent admired National Socialism, which promised to erect a bulwark against Bolshevism in Central Europe. The inner contradiction of both positions could only remain hidden as long as Germany and National Socialism did not begin to identify with each other.

The French partners of the Sohlberg circle were recruited from both camps, but under the influence of Jean Luchaire, the left had maintained a certain preponderance. Politically, the circle around "Notre Temps" was closest to the deputies who were striving for the renewal of the radical socialist party and - alluding to the role of the young revolutionaries in the old Ottoman Empire - were called "Les Jeunes Tures" in the Chamber. In the course of the general development of their political friends, Jean Luchaire

and his circle of associates should therefore have been among the first to reject any further attempts at Franco-German understanding after Hitler's seizure of power and to speak out in favor of war. They did not. Briand's former avant-garde remained loyal to him until his death. They saw the maintenance of peace as an absolute value and, despite their ideological opposition to the National Socialist regime, continued to support efforts to improve Franco-German relations.

While the various camps in France had already drawn up their fronts in March 1935, it was still completely unclear at this point what the new rulers of the Reich thought about the Franco-German question. - Was it to be feared that Hitler would stick to his old thesis of hereditary enmity? Could we hope that the author of "Mein Kampf" would revise his program and impose moderation on himself in the responsible position of statesman? Could Hindenburg and the German-nationalist ministers he appointed to the government keep Hitler's fanaticism in check?

The head of the foreign office of the German student body, Dr. Walther Reusch, who had already given the foreign policy presentation at the Sohlberg meeting, also took on this task in the much more difficult situation at the Paris conference in Easter 1933. He outlined the objectives of German foreign policy in objective terms, as had already been the case in Weimar politics. The new cabinet would undoubtedly make the restoration of the Reich's equal rights a very special goal. With regard to Franco-German relations, Dr. Reusch expressed the assumption that the National Socialist government would probably attach no less importance to an understanding with France than the previous republican government.

The predictions were to come true. In his first major foreign policy speech to the Reichstag on 17 May, Hitler went through the same lines of thought - in part almost verbatim - and emphasized his desire for Franco-German understanding with an emphasis that left nothing to be desired. A not overly witty but significant anecdote circulated in the Reich capital at the time. It was said that Hitler had been received by the Reich President for his first lecture on his intended policy towards France. At the end of the audience, Hindenburg exclaimed in astonishment: "That Stresemann suddenly has so much hair again".

Was Hitler's concession on the Franco-German question merely a deceptive maneuver intended for foreign countries? Was it a serious attempt to create a better understanding between the two peoples? - The answer to this question could only be found in practice: The degree and extent to which the National Socialist government allowed the idea of understanding to spread among its own German people.

The Berlin authorities remained silent about the Parisian hussar ride of the Sohlberg circle. Following the conference, the French youth and student leaders were received by Foreign Minister Paul Boncour. They told him that their organization was resolutely opposed to the preventive war plans being discussed in certain political and military circles.

The German conference participants also crossed the border on their way home without incident. Our National Socialist "showpiece", a youth leader from southern Baden, who had been a member of the SA

was particularly doubtful about the reception awaiting him. He preferred not to cross the Reich border at the strictly controlled Kehl, but at the small border station near Weißenburg further north.

When I returned to Karlsruhe, I continued the Sohlberg work unperturbed at my own risk and responsibility. An order came from a Berlin party headquarters to arrest me and commit me to a concentration camp. The regional leader of the Hitler Youth in Baden

made sure that this order was not obeyed. He was of Central German origin, but he had already settled in sufficiently in Baden to be able to form an independent opinion of my person and my Franco-German work.

One afternoon, two officers from the Secret State Police came to pick me up for questioning in the middle of my lesson. My principal, who had introduced the guests in the drawing room, was very willing to arrange a substitute for me. However, I asked the officers to be patient until the end of the lesson and invited them to sit in the classroom until then. Although I was teaching at a girls' secondary school at the time and was dealing with a not uninteresting art history topic in a senior class, the Gestapo officers preferred to wait outside in the corridor. The matter itself was completely satisfactory for me. I had sent a large number of copies of the Parisian review "La lutte des Jeunes" to members of the Sohlberg circle. A communist paper with the same title was on the list of foreign publications banned for import and distribution in the Reich. I had little trouble convincing the Secret State Police Office in Karlsruhe that these were obviously two completely different French magazines.

On another occasion, I was even accused of espionage. Parisian friends wanted to make a documentary about the Black Forest and I advised and accompanied them in choosing the subjects. This was reason enough to charge me with espionage and I narrowly escaped arrest.

Even the French secret service could not seem to find a natural explanation for the fact that young Germans were continuing the work of communication at a time when it had become more necessary than ever. One day I had a visit from a gentleman who introduced himself as an Alsatian and identified himself on his business card as a works engineer at a Karlsruhe machine factory. He had come, he told me, on behalf of young relatives and acquaintances who belonged to the autonomist movement and wanted to enter into relations with Germany via the Sohlberg district. My visitor's accent was free of any Alsatian inflection, and his gaze was anything but open. But without these observations I would have given him the same answer. I Isass, I explained, could provide particularly valuable services to Franco-German understanding because of its relationship with both countries. The way to do this, however, was via Paris. Young Alsations interested in getting in touch with the Sohlberg region were therefore advised to contact the

central committee of the French youth associations. My strange visitor never let me hear from him again. Several months later, however, I met him again by chance as an employee of a French consulate, where I went to get a visa.

In Berlin, a more objective and fairer appreciation of the work of the Sohlberg Circle was slowly gaining ground. The Reich Youth Leadership began to set up its own Border and Foreign Office, relying on the budget and advice of the Cultural Department in Wilhelmstrasse. At the instigation of the friendly consul who had received me before the Paris conference, the Foreign Office suggested to the Reich Youth Leadership that its France department be entrusted to the head of the Sohlberg Circle. Some members of the Sohlberg Circle, who had made themselves available to the party in the meantime, advised me to accept the offer. However, I reserved the right to reply.

On January 1, 1934, a Franco-German debate took place under the auspices of the Sohlberg Circle in Berlin, in which a number of leading representatives of the Hitler Youth and the National Socialist student body participated, while on the French side, several leaders of ideologically decidedly left-wing associations also took part.

In addition to social problems, the debate focused on the question of whether the Nordic racial idea emphasized by National Socialism should contribute to the division of the two peoples. The Parisian novelist and political essayist Pierre Drieu La Rochelle gave the

dominant speech on this subject. He explained that although France was strongly mixed with Mediterranean races and had for many centuries tended to favor the Latin cultural sphere, the Germanic element had nevertheless asserted itself no less in the old land of the Franks, Normans, Burgundians and Visigoths than in Germany, which had strong blood and spiritual ties to the East. A return to the common Nordic heritage could therefore lead to fruitful encounters between the two peoples and cultures.

It is worth mentioning that several full Jews on the French side also took part in the Berlin debate in January 1934. The National Socialist youth and student leaders not only met them in the most comradely manner during the official part of the conference program; they also devoted themselves to them privately in every conceivable way and invited them to go out into the city, share meals and visit them in their homes.

The Hitler Youth leaders I met during the Berlin debate made a generally favorable impression on me. Emotionally, they were probably all fanatical supporters and admirers of Adolf Hitler, but in many areas they did not seem to be as rigidly committed to doctrine as many party members of the older generation. In particular, they showed an openness to the Franco-German question which allowed the conclusion to be drawn that they believed the author of "Mein Kampf"'s new assurances of peace.

Nevertheless, I hesitated for half a year before I accepted the offer from the Reich youth leadership to head their 1st Reichkreis, with the proviso that my work would be voluntary, that I would not be obliged to serve in the Hitler Youth, and that the organizational independence of the Sohlbergkreis would not be affected by its affiliation with the foreign office of the Reichsjugend leadership. My conditions were met, and from the summer of 1934 I officially took over the French section of the Hitler Youth.

I had no regrets about this decision. It gave me extraordinary opportunities - and the only opportunities available in an authoritarian state - to spread the idea of Franco-German understanding among millions of young people.

The Sohlbergkreis newspapers, which had previously only appeared in loose succession, were now published monthly with the help of the Reich Youth Leadership. The Hitler Youth's own Führerzeitung "Wille und Macht" ("Will and Power") regularly published articles on the Franco-German question and even devoted several special issues to it. Well-known personalities from Franco-German intellectual life had the opportunity to speak to the Hitler Youth leadership corps, while vacation camps, exchange trips and reciprocal visits facilitated personal contacts with young France to the greatest extent possible.

The Hitler Youth has given rise to much criticism and also to much justified criticism. However, in the Franco-German field, which is of interest to us, it has carried out educational work that no foreign youth movement or national youth movement can match.

The idea of European understanding was so well received in their ranks that the High Command of the Wehrmacht feared that it would have a detrimental effect on their fitness for military service. It instructed its liaison officer to the Reich Youth Leadership to raise military concerns about the "overly musical education" of the Hitler Youth. This liaison officer was none other than the later General Field Marshal Rommel. All too soon and all too often he would have the opportunity to realize that these military fears were unfounded. The German youth stood their ground in the Second World War just as they had in 1914.

But if many French people were surprised that during the 1940 World War the young German soldiers were even more accommodating and chivalrous than the Wehrmacht members of the older age groups, the military circles could only congratulate themselves on the success of the educational work of the Hitler Youth in the pre-war period.

The Ribbentrop office

In July 1934, I travelled to Paris for two weeks as the French representative of the Reich Youth Leadership in order to finalize camp and trip plans for the summer vacations with the French youth organizations.

During this stay, I read excerpts in a German newspaper from the foreign policy speech that Rudolf Hess had given in Königsberg at the beginning of the month. As a former German front-line fighter, the Führer's deputy appealed to his comrades on the other side. Those who had been at the forefront of the war were the last to wish for a repeat of the genocide, and they were first and foremost called upon to join hands and stand up for good neighborly relations between nations.

The French press remained silent about this appeal and, as I could see, it had not found any echo in the circles of French front-line fighters either. The idea of winning over the former soldiers of the World War to a greater extent for the work of understanding had always been close to my heart. Among the friends of peace whom I had met over the years, the front-line fighters had always been among the most passionate. It also seemed to me that no one could defend Franco-German youth work more effectively against the accusation of unpatriotic "pacifism" than the men who had proven their patriotism on the battlefields.

I therefore took the opportunity of Rudolf Hess's Königsberg speech to visit the leaders of the various French front fighter organizations and convince them of the need for joint action. After several debates, some of which lasted many hours, most of the leaders of the French war veterans' organizations agreed to make contact with the German front-line fighters' organizations and to work with the youth organizations of the two countries to promote the idea of Franco-German understanding.

In order to keep the initiated action free of ideological misinterpretations and internal political polemics from the outset, I had turned to front-line fighter organizations of all camps. The left-wing, one-million-strong "Union Federale des Anciens Combattants et Victimes de la Guerre" had given me their approval, as had the leading leaders of the millions of right-wing front-line fighters who had joined together to form the "Union Nationale des Anciens Combattants". The Three political organizations, the "Srmuiic du < <mibattaut", which had about a thousand members, and several smaller associations were won over to the planned campaign of emancipation. With them, the organizations prepared to join forces with the German participants in the world war comprised a total of 3² million French front fighters.

After returning from Paris, I gave the Reich Youth Leadership a written report on the exchange of trips agreed with the French associations for the summer vacation. I attached a separate note to this report about the meetings I had held with the French front-line fighters' associations during my stay in Paris.

Two days later, the head of the Border and Foreign Office of the Reich Youth Leadership called me in a state of great excitement. "Great catastrophe! Schirach has sent your report on the front-line fighters to Hess, and a certain Ribbentrop has recently been sitting on all foreign policy matters. He's furious that the Reich youth leadership has gotten involved in the front-line fighter story. He wants to take you to a concentration camp. The Hitler Youth is behind you, but the case is serious. This Ribbentrop has a hell of a number on the Führer. He demands to see you immediately."

A few hours later I was standing in Ribbentrop's antechamber and was led into the

lion's den by an aide-de-camp.

The first glances we exchanged were not entirely free of surprise. I was surprised to see before me an exceptionally good type of that Nordic race which the party had made its program and which was so rarely to be found in its leadership corps. Ribbentrop seemed astonished to be confronted not by a knee-less Hitler boy, but by a man who was already half-grown.

However, he quickly composed himself and did not lack the necessary aplomb as he prepared to wash the head of the unauthorized sub-leader of the Reich Youth Leadership. "Every branch of the party imagines that it can mess around abroad as it sees fit. The Führer has appointed me to put things right. Mutual understanding between the front fighters, especially the German and French, could contribute greatly to international détente. But now the Hitler Youth have even got their hands into it, so of course everything has been ruined."

"Why messed up?" I objected in astonishment. "You don't seem to have seen my report. Three and a half million French front-line fighters are ready to make contact with their German comrades."

"What are you saying," Ribbentrop exclaimed and rushed to his desk to skim over a file. I recognized my report, which showed no signs of having been read, as well as a cover letter from Schirach with crumpled edges and underlining and exclamation marks deeply embedded in the paper.

When Ribbentrop had finished reading, he approached me and gave me a big look. "What's your name?" "Abetz." "Well, Abetz, I'm appointing you as my France adviser right away."

Ribbentrop would not accept my objections that I belonged to the Reichsjugendführung and could very well deal with the front-line fighter issue together with youth issues. "No, I need you for my office. I'll phone Hess straight away. Schirach must hand you over to me".

An interim solution was found. I retained the French department in the Reich Youth Leadership and was simultaneously assigned to work on French issues at Ribbentrop. However, this second assignment was soon to take up so much of my time that from the winter of 1934 onwards my Franco-German work was mainly anchored in Ribbentrop's office.

Although the "Ribbentrop Office" extended its radius of action far beyond France and dealt with almost all the major countries of importance to German foreign policy, it is perhaps appropriate to devote a brief consideration to it in this publication, which is devoted exclusively to Franco-German issues.

Before Ribbentrop officially took over as Reich Foreign Minister in February 1938, he had already been the Führer's closest foreign policy advisor for many years. He had only joined the party in 1932. However, one of the meetings that was decisive for Hitler's seizure of power had taken place in Ribbentrop's house in Lentze-Allee in Berlin-Dahlem. The suave and suave appearance of the scion of an old Westphalian officer's family, his language skills and connections acquired through long stays abroad as a commercial representative of large companies and, last but not least, the blind devotion to the Führer's cause and person, which could be read from his entire character, may have prompted Hitler to grant the still untested party member this privileged position.

Much has been published about Ribbentrop at home and abroad since the collapse of Germany. I believe that in his case, as with many of the leading men of the Third Reich, a sharp distinction must be drawn between a time in which they achieved undeniably significant things with the full force and freshness of their energy, and a time in which they were often no longer up to their tasks. An unimaginable pace of work and the

constant high nervous tension had already led to such a wear and tear in some of them shortly before the war, and in others only during the war, that the same men were only shadows of themselves and made mistake after mistake.

At the time we are concerned with here, i.e. the actual "heyday" of the Ribbentrop office, its head undoubtedly enjoyed extraordinary foreign policy successes.

As "Reich Commissioner for Disarmament Affairs", he represented German interests at various London conferences with unusual skill. The Anglo-German naval agreement was a diplomatic masterpiece. Not only did it grant Germany greater military freedom of movement at sea; this agreement broke through the most significant

Versailles victorious power itself signed the treaty created in 1919 and thus provided a precedent on which the Reich could rely politically and under international law in the event of further revisions. I remember a conversation that took place between Foreign Office officials and naval experts during the preliminary negotiations for the London Naval Agreement. In this conversation it was unanimously agreed that the British Government would never accept the German proposals and that it would be folly to even put them forward in London. However, this did not prevent the same circle from declaring after Ribbentrop's success: "What did it take, with 35% parity with the British fleet, anyone could have managed it".

The conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, which Ribbentrop signed as "Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the German Reich" in his Berlin office, and the Anti-Comintern Treaty with Italy, which Ribbentrop went to Rome to sign from his London ambassadorial post, which he had taken over in the meantime, also required diplomatic negotiations and foreign policy groundwork that no objective assessor could refuse to recognize.

The staff that Ribbentrop had recruited for his staff were primarily intended to support him in these foreign policy activities, but also to work generally to improve Germany's relations with foreign countries, whereby the individual officers were assigned a country or a group of countries.

The extent to which the Ribbentrop office lacked "bureaucracy" was unimaginable by ordinary standards and even by German standards. It was also left to the discretion of subordinate officers to travel abroad, make organizational decisions and use the Junker machine available to the office as soon as they deemed it necessary to conduct foreign policy contacts. Transferring the principle that applied to commercial activities to a political task force, Ribbentrop applied only one criterion: that of independent initiative and successful performance.

The personnel composition of the office was as unusual as its working methods. With the obvious intention of turning it into a kind of "pepinier" for a future type of activist diplomat and to give the English principle of "give him a chance" a chance among young Germans, Ribbentrop recruited his staff wherever he thought he had discovered a natural talent for foreign policy. This brought together some chaff, but also some wheat.

A light sailor, who had attracted attention for his exceptional self-acquired language skills while rescuing escaped German Foreign Legionnaires, was hired away from a merchant steamer. He arrived at the same office with his ship's bag on his shoulder, where bearers of old aristocratic names earned their first spurs in foreign policy. The aristocratic element.

was much more strongly represented in percentage terms than even in the Foreign Office, as several non-Aryans were still part of the department for a long time. Scholars devoted to international law and geopolitical studies, including a walking encyclopaedia of

conversation, alternated with outspoken "children of the world" who had made a name for themselves as merchants in the export business in South America or had completed long apprenticeships as planters on African and Lower Rural-Indian farms. Experts from the Middle and Far East were also not missing from the staff, which, given Ribbentrop's weakness for propaganda, naturally also included a contingent of press experts with old and young foreign experience.

As far as the selection of these very different personalities was not a matter of pure chance, Ribbentrop seemed to have in mind a mixture between a diplomatic training workshop and a kind of foreign policy "brain trust" when setting up his office. In any case, he preferred employees whose knowledge of foreign affairs had not been acquired theoretically and of whom it was certain that they had already been able to assert themselves in the country of their choice in some professional or other field under their own steam.

In addition to the aforementioned official duties assigned to him by Hitler, Ribbentrop also had a function in the party, in which he figured as "NSDAP representative for foreign policy issues" on the staff of the Führer's deputy. However, this function was only of a formal nature, as the preferred foreign policy advisor to Rudolf Hess, and probably also his candidate to succeed Neurath, was not Ribbentrop, but the head of the NSDAP's foreign organization, Gauleiter Bohle. However, on the basis of this assignment, Ribbentrop was able to claim rooms for himself and his office in the office building of the Hess staff, Wilhelmstrasse 64, which he had converted and furnished with as much effort as taste.

These rooms were directly opposite the rooms of the Foreign Ministry, and this "face to face" also applied to the views and methods of the two offices. After the brief digression about the Ribbentrop office, I would therefore like to take a short walk down Wilhelmstrasse to the Foreign Office.

Diplomacy has been one of the most criticized professions for a century, and its representatives have provided material for more than one comedy and one operetta. Balzac defines it in the "Human Comedy" as the "science of those who have none and who are deep because of their emptiness, a science which, moreover, is very convenient: since it requires discreet men, it allows those who know nothing to say nothing, to confine themselves to mysteriously weighing their heads; and finally, the strongest man in this science is the one who keeps his head floating above the flow of events, although he pretends to direct it: this virtue is a matter of the least specific weight."

In addition to being overly important and secretive, diplomats are also often accused of snobbery. Heir to an era in which his profession was almost

While the aristocracy of the past was exercised exclusively by members of old aristocratic families, the modern diplomat has retained a preference for aristocratic dress at table and socializing, even if a meal and reception do not take place in a historic palace but in a modern concrete building and a middle-class rented apartment. In many cases, he has no sense of the fact that what was charming about the real nobility was precisely its naturalness and that this nobility of naturalness must automatically be lost on anyone who wants to appear to be more than he is.

Snobbery can also lead to a one-sidedness in dealings that is detrimental to the diplomatic effect. In the form still practiced today, diplomacy dates back centuries, when a reasonably skilled representative in a foreign country could pull all the strings if he knew how to move properly within society and, if necessary, how to deal with the dozen commoners who were tolerated at court because of their intellect or their money.

In our century of mass movements, however, these accents have completely shifted,

however regrettable this may be from the point of view of social culture. Even the most witty and amiable aristocratic salon must not deceive itself and its guests about the fact that it no longer occupies a decisive place in the political power play of the capital. The diplomat who does not want to limit himself to a purely representative role in his mission must understand the contemporary factors of political public opinion, the major professional groups in the economy, the workers' unions, the youth movements and literary avant-gardes, the film and press circles and the popular parties and maintain contact with them first and foremost. In any case, the development of the times is such that foreign policy questions are no longer raised and settled exclusively between states, but also between peoples; all the more will the pressure of the street on the secret work of the cabinets increase.

In view of the poor response to the French and English front-line fighters' visits to Berlin in the winter of 1934/35 from officials at the Quai d'Orsay and the Foreign Office, a London journalist made the following remark to Hitler: "The old staff are still in office here in Downing Street, and also at the Quai d'Orsay, who would prefer a war declared according to all the rules of diplomacy to a peace which, without diplomacy, would come about through direct communication from people to people". Hitler pointed with his thumb over his shoulder towards the wall separating the Reich Chancellery from the buildings of the Foreign Office: "They are just like that." Including German professional diplomacy in this criticism is certainly unfair in this case. However, the derogatory judgment showed Hitler's insurmountable dislike of civil servants in general and those in the diplomatic service in particular. To the extent that this was merely exasperation at the excessive plans and daring

If Hitler acted in spite of the misgivings he may have encountered in individual cases, this hostility could only speak in favor of those it singled out. However, he probably had less cause to complain about active resistance to his unhealthy pace of revision than about passivity towards foreign policy initiatives that could be seen as positive.

Criticism of the Federal Foreign Office does not date back to the National Socialist era. As early as 1918, the great sociologist of the Weimar Republic, Max Weber, devoted a chapter to "Civil servants in foreign policy" in his work "Parliament and government in the newly organized Germany", which leaves nothing to be desired in terms of clarity. Using the example of the free entrepreneur, the military commander trained to act independently and the politician who grew up in the party struggle, he demonstrates why the civil servant, and even the most highly qualified civil servant, cannot develop political leadership qualities in an authority structured according to bureaucratic principles. Even among those with legal training, Max Weber attributes the necessary aptitude only to the independent lawyer. "The great advocate", he does not hesitate to explain, "is the only lawyer who - in contrast to the civil servant - is trained in fighting and in the effective representation of a cause through struggle."

There was certainly no ministry that surpassed the Foreign Office in terms of thoroughness of expertise and conscientiousness in the fulfillment of duty. But what diplomats should have possessed above and beyond the usual civil service virtues - the joy of personal responsibility, the creative imagination, the willingness to push through a foreign policy concept that was recognized as correct against other departments, the passion to turn a "mission" into something that would do justice to the beautiful original meaning of the word - were as rare as they were frowned upon. There were by no means fewer young talents in the Foreign Office than in the junior staff of the Ribbentrop department. However, the advancement regulations forced us to keep them systematically small and to entrust them with tasks and posts in which they could not develop freely. When I recommended civil servants for promotion during my years as ambassador in

Paris, I never had greater difficulties in the Foreign Office than when the people concerned were still relatively young, disproportionately talented and - career-wise.

It is also an unwritten law of the diplomatic service that its representatives only stay in the same place and country for a few years at a time. This tradition may have great advantages for the completion of the training of young diplomats. However, it is an immense hindrance to the work of senior civil servants, because as soon as they have settled in politically in a foreign capital and a foreign country, they are transferred to a new, unfamiliar world. The reason for this frequent change is that diplomats can easily become so impressed and absorbed by the atmosphere of the foreign capital and the foreign country during a longer period of service in the same foreign post that they no longer understand the position of their own country and government with the necessary persuasiveness. However, another "deformation professional" seems to me to have even more serious consequences when working in the same diplomatic post for a long time: the gradual spread of a negative attitude towards the country and the people to whom the diplomatic efforts are directed. This "growing old" can be observed in many foreign representatives. It can probably be explained by the fact that they are not only under a great deal of nervous strain due to the major vicissitudes of foreign policy relations, but that they also have to deal with the countless minor inconveniences to which their nationals are exposed within the country.

In the years when I was still involved in Franco-German youth exchanges, a German youth group - the first of its kind - undertook a trip to France. After weeks of hiking and camping in the Loire Valley and on the coast, they were finally received at the German Embassy in Paris. The head of mission, one of the most respected and esteemed diplomatic representatives the Reich had at its disposal, did not miss the opportunity to welcome the young guests personally and treat them to refreshing drinks and mountains of cakes in the embassy garden. But when the adolescent expatriates told of the enthusiastic reception their group had received from the French population everywhere with their songs and campfires, the friendly host thought he owed the youthful enthusiasm a small damper: "Believe me, boys," he replied skeptically to their enthusiastic descriptions, "there's nothing to be done with the French."

I personally encountered a similarly receptive attitude a year later when, during a stay in Paris, I took the opportunity to inform the chargé d'affaires of the embassy of the simultaneous founding of the "Franco-German Society" in Berlin and the "Comité France-Allemagne" in Paris. "The Embassy," replied the official, who was one of the most experienced and conscientious in his service, "must regard these foundations as premature. In our opinion, it would have been more correct to wait for a *courant favorable*." - I replied that he might not be wrong in his objection in certain respects. After all, such intergovernmental organizations were not created in order to be supported by a "courant favorable", but in the, certainly exaggerated, expectation - but what in the world would ever get off the ground without exaggerated expectations - of generating a "courant favorable".

This little controversy clearly expressed the difference between the views of the Foreign Office and those of the Ribbentrop office. On the one hand, officials who put all their ambition into critically analyzing the situation abroad and reporting back home with almost scientific precision, but who regarded this situation more or less as a given. There were foreign policy activists who, of course, did not fail to scrupulously review the impressions they gained during their visits abroad and report them back to the top, but who were less concerned with

It was more important to know how foreign policy was presented and developed than to

ensure that foreign policy was presented and developed in a way that served the interests of the Reich. Here an undeniable preponderance of specialist knowledge, knowledge of the history, constitutions and treaties of foreign states. There, a closer connection with the people and powers that determined the current political image and aspirations of the foreign nation.

It was regrettable that this thorough knowledge and this dynamic will did not complement each other more happily and that Ribbentrop, even as Reich Foreign Minister, did not understand how to make greater use of the great experience accumulated in the Foreign Office in diplomatic actions and, conversely, how to communicate a little more of the activist temperament of the "outsiders" to the traditional civil servants.

After the German collapse, there was understandably no lack of voices that wanted to place the blame for the Reich's foreign policy defeat solely on the shoulders of diplomats who had not emerged from their careers. However, in order to be able to form an objective judgment on this, three preliminary questions must be clarified. Firstly, what was the maximum, what was the average and what was the minimum that could be achieved for German foreign policy in the most important foreign states and capitals immediately before and during the war? Secondly, in which of these countries and capitals were the German missions during this period headed by former employees of the Ribbentrop office and in which by career civil servants? Thirdly, in which of these foreign states and capitals was the maximum, in which the average and in which the minimum of what was diplomatically possible achieved? - I believe that such a comparison would not be to the disadvantage of the heads of mission who emerged from the Ribbentrop office. The same applies to the headquarters in Wilhelmstrasse. Here, too, the new men proved themselves in the management and administration of the individual departments of the Foreign Office no less than the established civil servants. Although many of them had remained convinced party comrades for a long time, they even put up much more resolute and effective resistance to the increasingly unrealistic directives of Ribbentrop and the Führer's headquarters than the notoriously anti-party old career civil servants - with just one exception.

In many cases, it is completely absurd to view the question of foreign policy training and methodology raised here from the perspective of the opposites "party-opposition", "entrepreneurial spirit of the outsider - routine of the career". Just as some former members of Ribbentrop's office were more "civil servants" than his traditional persona] after they joined the Foreign Office, there were also some career civil servants whose diplomatic bravado, personal responsibility and foreign policy training were more than a match for the party.

political clout decidedly overshadowed anything offered by the Ribbentrop office. In his book "Behind the hill", Liddle-Hart demonstrated the parallel phenomenon in the German Wehrmacht. Here, too, there was insufficient interaction between the prudence and experience of the old general staff and the revolutionary combat methods of the armored generals demanded by the times. Here, too, there was a division of opinion, which was not so much a matter of sympathy or antipathy for a regime as a question of generation and temperament.

If Germany succumbed to overpowering enemy coalitions in both the First and Second World Wars, it was certainly not because German diplomacy lacked the right insights into how to prevent the overpowering enemy coalitions and, once they had been formed, how to break them up again. In both cases, the fault of the Foreign Service was rather that correctly recognized insights were inadequately represented to the political leadership and the head of state and that the foreign policy opportunities offered by these insights were

not seized to a greater extent of their own free will. Given the traditional attitude of their authority, German diplomats could not act as "politicians" who assumed personal responsibility for shaping foreign relations, neither in the German Empire nor in the National Socialist state. The conduct they were required to adopt was - to return to Max Weber's terminology of 1918 - the conduct of "civil servants".

The fiasco of German foreign policy in the two world wars therefore seems to us not to refute but to confirm the idea that inspired the formation of the "Ribbentrop Office". But if it is the highest official virtue to carry out orders received in complete fidelity to the letter and without asserting one's own point of view, then Ribbentrop, as Reich Foreign Minister, did not allow himself to be surpassed in official virtue by any of his subordinates in the Foreign Office in his rigid adherence to Hitler's "expressions of will". At the time when Ribbentrop was still the heavyweight in the office, however, all his manly loyalty did not prevent him from vehemently contradicting Hitler on many important issues and asserting his point of view - to name just the introduction of the alliance policy with Japan. In doing so, he added the only major military power to the German alliance system.

Were Ribbentrop's pre-war foreign policy plans based not only on defensive but also offensive intentions, as is often assumed today? Is the assertion - admittedly made by interested parties - that as Hitler's closest diplomatic advisor he bore great responsibility for the fact that the outbreak of the Second World War was not prevented?

I was always too confined to my Franco-German section of the work to presume to make a personal judgment on this general question.

to be able to do so. As far as my own experience is concerned, however, I can testify to the best of my knowledge and conscience that there could have been no statesman who would have wished to maintain peace between Germany and France more sincerely than Ribbentrop.

In the first few months of our acquaintance, Ribbentrop once drew me into a long private conversation. "My grandfather," he explained to me, "was a passionate Guelph and refused to even shake hands with a Prussian. My father served as an officer in the Prussian army. I myself hardly know that there are Hanoverians and Prussians any more, I just feel German. Who knows whether my descendants will still make a distinction between Germans and French and not feel exclusively European."

When I officially took over the France department in the office in the fall of 1934, Ribbentrop gave me the following guidelines: "The goal of German foreign policy is to reach a good understanding between the signatory powers of the Quadripartite Pact. The relationship between Rome and Berlin is not free of difficult problems. German-English relations will not become as friendly as we would like them to be overnight either. But the greatest difficulty of all is understanding between Germany and France. I know how much you have made this task your own for years. There should be no lack of what I can do to help you. You can take and promote any initiative in my name that serves Franco-German understanding. If you need the support of third parties and organizations, you can always expressly refer to me. For me, too, an old and often expressed wish would be fulfilled if the two great European cultural nations could become good neighbors."

I made extensive and extensive use of Ribbentrop's blanket power of attorney in the years that followed. However, he never withdrew or restricted it.

The front-line fighter understanding

In 1932, I had already made plans with French youth organizations as to how the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1914 could be celebrated on both sides of the Rhine with the participation of front-line fighters in solemn peace rallies. At the time, I would never have dreamed that none of these rallies, some of which were very impressively planned, would be realized. But I would have dreamed even less that on August 2, 1934, I would attend a discussion of German and French front fighters at the Hotel Stephanie in Baden-Baden, which had come about thanks to a power of attorney granted to me by Hitler's closest foreign policy advisor. This working meeting was certainly not as spectacular as would have been appropriate for the historic date, but it opened up great prospects for future peace work by the front fighters. The representatives of the 3% million French organizations, which I had already won over for the work on my own initiative in Paris a few weeks earlier, were sitting opposite the leaders of 6% million German front fighters, whom I had been able to summon with Ribbentrop's authorization to contact their French comrades on the eve of 2 August.

Through the open windows and high balcony doors of the meeting room, the view fell on the grounds and trees of Lichtentaler Allee. But none of the walkers and bathers promenading in their shade on this summer's day had any idea that decisions were being taken in the nearby hotel that could possibly have great significance for the improvement of relations between the German and French peoples. The front-line leaders of Germany and France agreed not only on regular visits, discussions and meetings between their organizations, but also on actively influencing public opinion in their countries in order to detoxify the atmosphere. Particular attention was to be paid to the press and to educating young people in the spirit of Franco-German understanding.

Three months later, on November 2, 1934, the first French delegation of front-line fighters arrived in Berlin to visit Hitler. As I was accompanying them as an interpreter, I was able to meet the Führer in person and observe him at close quarters.

It was All Souls' Day. On this day, people in Catholic countries decorate the graves of their deceased. Hitler, who despite everything could never completely deny his catholic origins, commemorated them in his words of welcome.

the significance of the day. He appealed to the millions of fallen front-line fighters who were present during this gathering in the spirit of their surviving comrades.

My first impression was that Hitler physically repelled me. In the room of the Reich Chancellery where the reception took place, which was still furnished with the old Hindenburg furniture, he seemed to me almost like a somnambulistic apparition. His gait seemed inhibited, his facial structure lacked clear angles and lines that would have allowed a physiognomic judgment. The exterior of his appearance was plain, but very neat. The rebellious streaks of his fighting years rarely fell into his forehead, and his hair, slightly graying at the temples, was well cut. The brown skirt and black pants of the party uniform were made of the best fabric. The black silk tie tied to the barely starched white shirt bore the simple round party badge. His feet were in shiny black patent leather boots with elasticated ankles that were a little too wide.

What immediately captivated me were Hitler's eyes. Eyes of an unusually suggestive blue, from which the glances flashed with the cutting, cold fire of crystals. Then I was captivated by his hands, very delicate, slender hands. On the small round table around which we were seated, they accompanied the conversation with sparing but incredibly expressive gestures.

In the course of the conversation, I noticed a peculiar change in the color of Hitler's face. When he was at rest, his complexion was tinted an almost powdery pink; but when he became more involved in the subject and became more agitated in his remarks, his face suddenly became unusually pale, as if all the blood had drained from it. The complexion was then so unnaturally white that I wondered how a portraitist could have rendered it without resorting to a different color scale from that used for the rest of the picture. I also wondered what effect this temporarily off-key brightness of the facial color would have had on superstitious people in the Middle Ages!

I could detect nothing in Hitler's facial expression that would have betrayed a personal human interest in his French guests, but also nothing that would have allowed the conclusion of hidden ulterior motives. He received the statements of the French front-line leaders with obvious attention and sympathy and then himself developed the reasons for a peaceful and lasting reconciliation of the national interests of the two countries in objective, well-formulated sentences.

The vice president of the "Union Nationale des Anciens Combattants", Jean Goy, who had led the French front-line fighter delegation on this visit, published his impressions of Berlin and Hitler's statements in the form of an interview in a Parisian daily newspaper on November 15, 1934. This was the prelude to the great communication offensive of the front-line fighters - and to the simultaneous general mobilization of the opponents of Franco-German communication.

A large section of the Parisian press showered the French Front leaders with reproaches because they had made contact with their German comrades and had held talks with Hitler in Berlin. In the chamber to which Jean Goy belonged as a member of a national party, his colleague Franklin Bouillon attacked him in such an insulting manner that a duel was proposed. Franklin Bouillon, who had only distinguished himself as a home warrior in 1914-1918, accused the front-line soldier of having received such large sums of money from Hitler that they would be forced to make payments in "goys" rather than "francs" in future. Even Jean Goy's own president of the "Union Nationale des Anciens Combattants", Georges Lebecq, believed he had to move away from him. He publicly disavowed him and claimed that the Berlin trip had taken place without the approval of the association's board. However, a national congress of this front-line fighters' organization convened after this incident expressed the confidence of all the delegates in Jean Goy and appointed him president in place of Georges Lebecq.

Shortly before Christmas 1934, the second French front-line fighters' visit to Berlin and Hitler took place, this time under the leadership of Henri Pichot, President of the "Union Federale des Anciens Combattants et Victimes de la Guerre". In addition to the need for communication in general, a particularly topical issue was discussed during this visit. The Saar referendum was imminent, and French newspapers had published reports that the SA formations of the neighboring districts were ready to march into the Saar region before election day. In Germany, of course, rumors to the contrary immediately

began to circulate, claiming that French troops were being assembled and ordered to advance along the Saar border. Both sides accused their opponents of trying to prevent a free, secret vote by using force; the slightest incident could take on dangerous proportions in this tense atmosphere.

Hitler assured the French front-line fighter leaders that there was no truth in the allegations of the foreign press. In order to completely dispel these rumors, however, he would immediately forbid all SA units in the border regions to perform any kind of service until the Saar referendum had been concluded. For their part, the French front-line leaders assured that the French General Staff had never considered intervening in the Saar referendum by force of arms or opposing a possible unfavorable result for France by force of arms. They suggested that the League of Nations should entrust larger contingents of former world war participants from both countries with the joint supervision of the preparation and implementation of the Saar referendum.

This suggestion, to which Hitler had given his approval for the German front-line fighters, did not need to be pursued further. The League of Nations had already advocated a corresponding trusteeship on its own initiative in the same days.

on the Saar referendum. Various of its member states, which were neutral on this issue, were prepared to provide military contingents for the security service in the voting area. This ensured that the Saarland population was able to make its national commitment free from any external pressure. However, it deserves to be noted in the history of Franco-German understanding that the front-line fighters would not have been absent from the roll call if their services had been required for the smooth implementation of the Saar referendum.

The reasonable and loyal solution to the Saar question eliminated a not harmless source of conflict between the two peoples and did much to ease the Franco-German atmosphere. For its part, the Reich generously recognized the French capital interests in the Saar mines. By mutual agreement, they were estimated at 1 billion Reichsmark and transferred in annual installments. By the outbreak of war in 1939, this account had been paid down to 1/10.

After the return of the Saar to the Reich, Hitler announced that there were no longer any territorial issues between Germany and France. He thus renewed the voluntary renunciation of Alsace-Lorraine, which he had already expressed in several previous declarations. - Was this voluntary recognition of the borders drawn by the Treaty of Versailles sincere?

Ernst Robert Curtius, a Romance philologist from Alsace in Bonn, once said that the Alsatian had a French "national feeling" and an Alsatian "feeling of home", something that the French could never understand and the Germans only rarely. Hitler was certainly not one of these rare cases. He did not question the Reich's historical legal title to the ethnic German territories on the left bank of the Rhine. However, he was prepared to sacrifice this legal title for the sake of good understanding and the maintenance of peace with France. In the same way, he saw the renunciation of South Tyrol as the price for friendship with Italy, just as he held back on colonial claims in order to facilitate the desired rapprochement with England.

It cannot be denied that Hitler tried even harder than the Weimar politicians not to

upset France in the Alsace-Lorraine question. With the means of power that an authoritarian state has at its disposal vis-à-vis the organs of public opinion and private initiatives, everything that could cause tension in this area on the other side of the Rhine was prevented. The sincerity of this statesman's declarations can only be judged by the fact that his renunciation of the old imperial lands before the world public was unambiguous. As this renunciation represented the price of peace with France in his eyes, he naturally changed his position with the outbreak of war, just as he changed his position on the South Tyrolean question after Italy's breach of faith in 1943.

Was it politically expedient that the Western powers, and France in particular, did not accept Hitler's offers of understanding in 1934 and 1935?

Not iz taken? - A frank discussion on the revision of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, which were untenable in the long term, could still have led to a reasonable mutual agreement at this point and set Hitler on a moderate course. But since the most reasonable and justified of his proposals were not listened to, he had to come to the conclusion that Germany could only be transformed from a nation of inferior rights into a nation of equal rights through unilateral action. Once Hitler had taken this path, however, it was inevitable, given his disposition, that he lost his temper and that, with the growing, unbridgeable hostility of foreign countries, the pathologically extreme tendencies of his character regained the upper hand.

Today, French diplomats also agree that it was a big mistake to reject the German proposals to limit armaments in April 1934 with the so-called "Barthou Note". Ribbentrop, in his capacity as "Reich Commissioner for Disarmament Affairs", had visited Barthou in Paris as late as December 1933 in order to persuade him to accept an acceptable parity in the field of armaments; he had proposed in particular a limitation of the German land forces to 3,000,000 men. It seems to have been proven that the negative note bearing Barthou's name, which was handed over on April 17, 1934, was not due to him personally, but to Tardieu.

It was understandable that the front-line fighters on both sides of the Rhine took a very special interest in the discussion on the issue of armaments, which was so crucial to war and peace. Soldiers and former soldiers have a strong sense of chivalry and honor. Many French participants in the Great War were of the opinion of Marshal Foch that an opponent who had fought as bravely as the German soldier should have been left with his weapons after the Allied victory. Conversely, however, the generation of front-line fighters had experienced first-hand what the rearmament and arms race had led to before 1914.

A few days after the introduction of two-year compulsory service in France and the reintroduction of general conscription in Germany in March *93 5, Hitler received the leader of the French War Blind Association, Parisian MP Georges Scapini. The reception, initially planned for Berlin, took place in a room at the Hotel Dreesen in Godesberg as a result of the Führer's trip to the Rhineland. As chance would have it, Georges Scapini had spent part of his school years at the Protestant Pädagogium in this city.

When Hitler greeted his guest, he had tears in his eyes. "I, who was blind myself for a time and thought I would never regain my sight, can appreciate the sacrifice you have made for your fatherland." The undoubtedly genuine emotion that was reflected in Hitler's face at these words quickly gave way to a deadpan expression when he countered the French member of parliament's objections with the German theses on the armaments issue. During the conversation, which lasted more than three hours, I realized that Hitler did not understand the French language.

was not entirely ignorant. When I used the word "desarmement" at a certain point in the translation of one of his long remarks, he interrupted me with the remark that the expression "limitation des armements" came closer to the idea he had expressed in this context.

One of Hitler's public speeches also took place at that time, which for the first time made me waver in my distrust of him and convinced me of the sincerity of his love of peace. "A medium-sized modern grenade," he told a large gathering, "costs 3,500 marks. A small home for a working-class family also costs 3500 marks. If I rearm, I'll need at least

10 million grenades. They will then lie in the arsenals and nobody will be grateful to me for them. But if I build 10 million workers' homes, I will secure the gratitude of the majority of my people. How could I not want the others to disarm in order to save me the trouble of rearming? But in the midst of a Europe armed to the teeth, Germany alone cannot remain unarmed." - I must confess that I was greatly impressed by the simplicity and logic of this argument. I began to believe Hitler that he wanted to put all available means at the service of the social task and carry out the reconstruction of Germany with works of peace.

Many French people thought in those years, when perhaps everything could still have turned out well, that one should at least "talk" to Hitler and not avoid his attempts at a Franco-German rapprochement as a matter of principle. The French front leaders advocated this idea with the weight that four million supporters gave them. In March 1936, the umbrella organization of all French front-line fighters, the "Confederation nationale des Anciens Combattants", sent a message of readiness for understanding to the German participants in the world war, which was reciprocated by the latter in an equally cordial and comradely spirit. Regular visits and meetings had been taking place between the German and French front-line combatant organizations since the winter of 1934. The German delegations were mostly led by Reichskriegsopferführer Oberlindober and the representative of the Kyffhäuser Bund, Freiherr von Humann-Hainhofen, while on the French side the leadership was mainly in the hands of Jean Goy and Henri Pichot. Certainly for the first time in history, large mass organizations in both countries were not committed to the propaganda of hatred and mistrust, but to the spread of better mutual understanding.

The psychological effects of this action on all sections of the population were no small concern for the sworn enemies of Franco-German understanding. The front fighters had a seamless network of local organizations with cells in even the smallest villages. Their association magazines and newsletters were independent of the influences of the official daily press and had millions of readers. In this way, the idea of Franco-German understanding was able to reach into the from the last fishing hut in the Basque Country and on the Baltic coast to the most remote farmhouse in Brittany and Provence, the Lüneburg Heath and the Bavarian Alpine valleys.

Numerous lectures and public rallies were also organized as part of this communication campaign. Front-line fighters and youth delegations from the neighboring country were always invited to the large congresses of the associations. Henri Pichot was able to speak to over 100,000 German participants in the Great War at a conference of the Kyffhäuser Federation on the Berlin sports field decorated with the tricolor. 2000 German front-line fighters were welcomed by their French comrades to a peace rally in Besancon, where the entire population participated enthusiastically and gave the German guests a warm welcome in the streets decorated with flowers and banners. An equal number of French front-line fighters gathered for large rallies of understanding in Stuttgart and Freiburg. Here, too, the cities outdid themselves in their warmth and enthusiasm in welcoming the participants in the world war from the neighboring country.

However, the most impressive of all these meetings of front-line fighters took place on the twentieth anniversary of the great battles for Fort Douaumont in Verdun in August 1936. The first man to storm Fort Douaumont, Captain von Brandis, had personally taken over the leadership of the five hundred-strong German delegation. Among the French who

took part in the silent commemorative march to the heights that had been so hotly contested twenty years ago, there were also quite a few who had personally taken part in these battles.

Both armies had won glorious victories in the battle for this height. But the greatest victor on this blood-soaked earth had remained death. Thousands of wooden crosses flashed eerily in the reflection of the beacon that circled restlessly in all four directions from the tower of the memorial on the mountain top and under which a huge crypt held the bones of a hundred thousand unknown Verdun fighters. It was in front of these crosses and in front of this mighty monument to the dead that the front-line fighters gathered with the banners of their nations for nightly prayers and to swear for peace.

Anyone who witnessed this hour will never forget it. The silent columns marching up from the valley in broad lines at nightfall, Germans and Frenchmen side by side, barely distinguishable from one another by a field gray weathercoat here or a beret there and the "musette" slung over their shoulders. The arrival and gathering on the summit, dominated by the massive silhouette of the Gebeinhaus, the words "peace", "la paix", which had a completely different sound in the mouths of these men than in the talk of the officials and which the night wind carried far into the countryside.

(Heavy rain clouds moved over the heights of the Meuse. Down in the darkness lay the city of Verdun. Here, where a millennium ago the unfortunate division of the evening When the reign of Charlemagne was completed, the thousand-year succession dispute that had arisen as a result had also reached its bloodiest conclusion.

Should the world continue to be presented with the spectacle of the two leading nations of Europe remaining at loggerheads, of the heirs of the Carolingian Empire remaining irreconcilable opponents?

Or could one hope that the hatred of the states and the mistrust of the chancelleries would one day have to give way to the good will of the peoples and common sense, as expressed so strongly in the understanding of the front-line fighters?

Who would win the race between war and peace?

On both sides of the Rhine, the former world war participants were pitted against numerically inferior opponents with superior influence and resources in the battle for public opinion. The enemy camps in both countries were becoming increasingly clear. When the friends of understanding united in the Reich to form the "Franco-German Society" and in France to form the "Comite France-Allemagne", it was only natural that the front-line fighters took the lead in these societies and joined them corporately with their millions of members.

Franco-German Society and Comite France-Allemagne

During the Weimar Republic, there had already been a lively "Deutsch- Französische Gesellschaft" in the Reich with an excellent journal, the "Deutsch- Französische Revue", and branches in several large cities. It was headed by the Lübeck art historian Professor Grautoff, and on occasion of the meeting on the Sohlberg in 1930 and the Mainz debate in 1932, its branches in Stuttgart and Frankfurt had given very warm receptions to the participants of these youth conferences. However, even in the heyday of Briand's and Stresemann's policies, this "Franco-German Society" in the Reich did not have a corresponding society in France. It was only in loose contact with the predominantly philologically interested "Ligue d'Etudes Germaniques", which was led by the Retheier Professor Gaucher and whose association journal had the beautiful title "Se connaitre". "Se connaitre" was the beautiful title of its magazine.

There was also the "Franco-German Study Committee", which was often referred to as the "Mayrisch Committee" after its founder, the Luxembourg industrial magnate, and which maintained permanent secretariats in both Berlin and Paris. This "Franco-German Study Committee" also included culturally interested personalities in both countries, such as Andre Siegfried, professor at the Paris "Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques", and the former Saxon Minister of State von Nostitz-Wallwitz. However, in keeping with the aim of the foundation, the emphasis was on the leading men of the economy. In addition to the leading industrialists of the Rhineland and the Ruhr region, the Berlin Committee also included the President of Deutsche Bank and Chairman of the Supervisory Boards of Ufa, Lufthansa and Mercedes Benz, State Councillor von Stauss, in its ranks. The Paris committee included names such as Charles Rist, Ernest Mercier and Comte de Peyrimhoff, the leading figures of French high finance, the energy industry and the Comite des Forges and Comite des Houilleres, to name just a few of the groups involved on both sides.

Although Franco-German cooperation on an economic basis generally ran much more smoothly from the mid-1920s onwards than in other areas, with successes such as the Franco-German potash agreement or the agreements between the German coal and French ore production industries, the economic cooperation between the two countries had a lot to do with this.

The preparatory economic work and the personal connections of the members of the Mayrisch Committee made an outstanding and commendable contribution to this. However, these contacts and agreements between the leading figures of the economic groups could not lead to a psychological rapprochement of the broad masses in both countries. Even the daily newspapers controlled by them or regarded as their direct organs made no attempts in this direction and did not distinguish themselves from the rest of the press by any greater moderation in the face of Franco-German tensions in the political sphere.

The "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft", founded in autumn 1935 under the auspices

of the front-line fighters, and its Parisian sister organization, the "Comite France-Allemagne", also sought to secure the cooperation of the aforementioned circles and gave their representatives the places they deserved on the boards and honorary presidencies of the new foundations. Given the impulses emanating from the front-line fighter movements, however, it was understandable that the newly founded organizations of understanding placed even greater emphasis on winning over the decisive political strata and on reaching the broad masses of the people.

As with the usual intergovernmental societies, there were also individual memberships in the "Comite France-Allemagne" and the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft". Leading public figures, luminaries of science, retired diplomats and generals, church dignitaries, great names from the academies of poetry and art made up the traditional audience of hall and table guests at lectures, concerts and receptions for prominent foreign guests, just as they did at numerous other intergovernmental societies. What was new, however, were the corporate memberships of the "Comite France-Allemagne" and the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft", which were founded in autumn 1935.

There had already been talk of the corporate membership of the front-line fighters' associations. In the "German-French Society", Reich war victims' leader Oberlindober took over the vice-presidency as head of the largest German organization of World War II participants, the "National Socialist War Victims' Association", which had 6 million members. The mass organization of the Hitler Youth, with its 8 million followers, followed the example of the front-line fighters. The old publications of the "Sohlberg Circle" were taken out of the hands of the Reich Youth Leadership and continued to be published bilingually as a joint organ of the "Franco-German Society" and the "Comite France-Allemagne". The magazine was still published in Karlsruhe, but the Black Forest fir tree on the cover was replaced as a graphic symbol by the statuette of Charlemagne from the Metz cathedral treasury.

With the carte blanche given to me by Ribbentrop, I approached all the major branches of the state and the party to persuade them to join the "Franco-German Society". The organization

"Kraft durch Freude", the "Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft" and its affiliated associations, the "N.S.-Volkswohlfahrt", the organization of the Reichssportführer, the "Reichsarbeitsdienst" and the "Reichsnährstand" were soon represented in the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" as well as the student body, the "Nationalsozialistische Dozentenschaft" or the various branches of the "Reichskulturkammer".

Bringing these different organizations together for joint meetings and initiatives was not an easy task at first. The outsider always saw the uniform brown shirt and the same party badge in the organizations of the Third Reich. It was therefore easy to draw the wrong conclusion that there was a corresponding uniformity of spirit. In reality, however, the contrasts under this uniform were no less strong than under any other political regime. Bismarck had broken the particularism of the German states, Hitler the particularism of the German parties. But since, according to the well-known law, energies - both good and bad - are never lost, German particularism celebrated its happy birthday in the National Socialist departments. In the working group of Karlsruhe youth leagues of the blessed Republic of Weimar, there was far less tension between the communist and national, Christian and free-religious groups than I had the opportunity to observe between the various ministries

and party offices in Adolf Hitler's Berlin.

The "Franco-German Society" paid particular attention to the involvement of working people's professions in its activities. The basis of any true understanding between two peoples is mutual respect. During the war, the German and French peoples had learned to respect each other through the courage and efficiency of their soldiers on the battlefields. The courage and efficiency that both peoples showed in their work could contribute much to their mutual respect in peace. The organizational problem that the "Franco-German Society" faced in this respect was not only to actively interest the leading groups of the economy and the German Labour Front in the work of understanding, but also to approach the subdivisions down to the individual workers' and craftsmen's groups. Accordingly, the "Deutsch- Französische Gesellschaft" endeavored to obtain the cooperation of representatives of the winegrowers' and gardeners' associations from the Reichsnährstand, for example, or, in the field of health care, to involve the various medical associations and medical assistants' associations in addition to the authority of the Reichsärztführer. In this context, it should be mentioned that the membership fees for the "Deutsch- Französische Gesellschaft" were left to the discretion of the individual bodies, but that the highest voluntary donations came from the professional association of the - I kbummnicn. Anyone who knows the pain and difficulties of giving birth to a child obviously has a special interest in ensuring that life is not again carelessly and cruelly destroyed by human hands.

The "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" held regular working meetings with the representatives of all these front-line fighters, youth, sports, women's, social and professional organizations delegated to its association. In this way, it had a unique general staff, independent of the fluctuations of high politics, for the dissemination of the idea of understanding in all classes and divisions of the German people. The five branches in the empire, of which the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft in den Hansestädten" often surpassed the Berlin headquarters in terms of activity, were structured according to the same principles.

In France, which was less organizationally inclined, corporate membership of the "Comite France-Allemagne" was limited to the "Union Nationale" and the "Union Federale des Anciens Combattants", whose presidents Jean Goy and Henri Pichot shared the general secretariat. However, in addition to these two officially participating front fighter organizations, each of which had one million supporters, a large number of youth groups and several trade and craft corporations with a total of 3 5 0,000 members were also virtually represented in the "Comite France-Allemagne" through the active participation of their executive committees.

The journalist Comte de Brinon, Professor Fourneau, a member of the Institut Pasteur, and Gustave Bonvoisin, the director of the social work of the family equalization funds, were elected vice-presidents of the "Comite France-Allemagne". De Brinon, who had been a member of Marshal Petain's staff during the First World War and was later to play a political role, was the first French member of the press to be interviewed by Hitler in 1933. His book "France-Allemagne" was one of the best and clearest descriptions of the Franco-German question in French literature between the two wars. Professor Fourneau, who was already very old, was one of France's greatest researchers in the field of chemistry, a member of the Academie des Sciences and a representative of those old generations of scholars whose knowledge and interests extended universally to all areas of the natural

sciences and humanities. He had been close personal friends with a number of important German researchers for decades. As head of the "Allocations familiales", Gustave Bonvoisin's interests were primarily social and demographic. As a convinced Catholic, the World War II officer, who was decorated several times for bravery in the face of the enemy, had become a supporter of the idea of Franco-German understanding. I have never forgotten how he once stepped out onto the roof terrace of his always hospitable house in the Jardin des Batignolles after dinner with German visitors. He looked towards the neighboring Montmartre, at the foot of which the red glow of the neon signs gave a hint of the alleys with the entertainment venues. "This down there," he said, "is what foreigners know of Paris. But that other Paris" - and his gaze turned to the Sacre-Coeur, whose dome stood out against the night sky in the moonlight - "that other Paris is mostly unknown to foreigners."

The presidency of the "Comite France-Allemagne" was taken over in 1935 by the former aide and close confidant of Marshal Foch, Commandant l'Hôpital, and in the following year by the Parisian deputy and lawyer Georges Scapini. Georges Scapini, who was Marshal Petain's ambassador to the French prisoners of war in Germany during the Second World War, was one of the most humanly interesting and intellectually superior minds in political France and championed the cause of understanding. When, as a very young man, he had to readjust to the world after his serious war injury, he published his experiences and insights in a small book entitled "L'apprenti de la nuit". With admirable energy, he acquired an extensive sphere of activity. In addition to his legal practice and political work, he also worked as a sculptor and - thanks to his extraordinary powers of imagination based on descriptions - even as a film director. One of his self-directed works, the feature film "Un carnet de bal", won an international award.

As with the "Comite France-Allemagne" in Paris, the leadership of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" in Berlin was in the hands of the front generation. Professor Achim von Arnim, Pour-le-Merite winner and Rector of Charlottenburg Technical University, took over the chairmanship. As a young lieutenant in 1914, he had been the hero of the undertaking depicted by Rudolf G. Binding in his novella "Wir fordern Reims zur Übergabe auf" (We demand the surrender of Reims) and, despite being wounded, took part in combat operations on all fronts in the further course of the war. I not only owe a great deal of support for my German-French communication work to this chivalrous and intellectually extremely lively nobleman, who also composed and wrote in addition to his lectures, but also a great deal personally. His Kunersdorf estate in the Mark, in whose manor house Adalbert von Chamisso had written "Peter Schlemihl", taught me to look at the issue of large landowners in the rural areas east of the Elbe with different eyes. As a southwest German, I naturally preferred a hundred free small farmers on their own land to large-scale farming carried out by one landowner and ninety-nine employees and farm workers. However, direct experience convinced me that the very different land conditions in East Germany demanded large-scale farming in the interests of feeding the people, and that the farm workers themselves were no worse off economically and socially if they were shown as much concession in terms of wages and the construction of housing as the landlord in Kunersdorf. What an indispensable role the manor houses east of the Elbe had played and could still play as cultural centers of the countryside was shown to me by visits

and receptions at Kunersdorf Castle, which also frequently included French guests in its social life.

The vice presidency of the "Franco-German Society" was shared by the Reich war victims' leader Oberlindober and the professor of international law at the University of Münster, lawyer Dr. Grimm, and the envoy Dr. von Raumer. Professor Grimm's work on the Society's board was particularly important as he had been the leading lawyer for the German cause in the Rhine and Ruhr Wars. His open commitment to the idea of Franco-German understanding was not without effect in those areas of the Reich where the French occupation had left behind strong resentment. As Professor Grimm had defended Belgian and French nationals before German military courts in 1914-1918 and had represented the Reich legally at the "Commission d'arbitrage mixte" in Paris in the post-war years, he was also a well-known figure in France. The envoy von Raumer, an officer by training, had been taken prisoner in France during the First World War, from which he made an adventurous escape attempt. After the war, he worked as an economist in Russia and the Far East and headed Ribbentrop's eastern department for several years. During this time he was particularly involved in the preparations for and conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan. Dr. von Raumer also tended towards scientific studies on the politics and philosophies of the Eurasian countries and thus represented a world of problems in the "German-French Society" which the work of understanding in the West had to take into account all the more strongly than it seemed at first glance to be remote from it.

The founding event of the "Franco-German Society" took place in November 1934 at a concert in Monbijou Palace in Berlin. A few days later, the founding event of the "Comite France-Alle-Magne" followed in Paris with a large reception in honor of the Reich Sports Leader von Tschammer and Osten, who used this occasion to present France with the official invitation to the Olympic Games. This also set the task that was to be the focus of the annual work of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" in 1936: the reception of the extraordinarily large number of French guests who came to the Reich for the Olympics. A special delegation from the "Comite France-Allemagne" had already arrived for the Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. At the Summer Games in Berlin, the number of members of the Parisian sister society was so great that the house of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" was not large enough to accommodate them and a large villa next door and mass accommodation in the city had to be reserved for them.

In addition to their general international character, the Olympic Games also had a special Franco-German significance. After all, it was a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who had revived the idea of the Olympic Games. Germany, however, now gave this idea a realization on its soil that eclipsed all previous Olympiads and, in the spirit of the innovator of the Olympic Games, also allowed the Muses to have their say alongside the sporting competitions in accordance with ancient Hellenic custom.

(Overnight, an architecturally beautiful stadium with a capacity of 200,000 spectators, a large Olympic village to accommodate the competing teams and a magnificent open-air stage with seating for 40,000 spectators were built on the Reichssportfeld in the west of Berlin. The latter had its stone benches stacked like an ancient amphitheater in a semi-circular hollow, while the stage opposite rose beyond the small valley on one of the hilly foothills of the Grunewald forest. Over the pine-covered slopes, the view swept far into the

serious Mark Brandenburg landscape. Attending an evening performance of Handel's "Heracles" with masterful forces in this natural setting was an incomparable experience.

The Olympic facilities on the Reichssportfeld were dominated by towers that were visible from afar, the largest of which bore a bell with the inscription: "I call the youth of the world". This bell tower rose above the stadium's marathon gate, in front of which the Olympic flame was burning. Its fire had been passed on in a relay from Greece to the imperial capital. Breathless, solemn silence fell over the crowd of more than two hundred thousand spectators as the last runner in the long chain arrived with his torch under the marathon gate and gave the signal for the opening of the Olympic Games by lighting the flame.

The sports teams of the individual nations began to march in. While the French participants had already been greeted with particular warmth by the German population at the Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the ovations they now received from the crowds of spectators far exceeded those given to the other nations. "Claque", "Brigade d'acclamations", wrote certain Parisian newspapers. This comment was wrong. Even the best organized claque cannot stir two hundred thousand people into a storm of enthusiasm. Moreover, if such an organization had been at work at all, its efforts should have been directed at the Italian team, as the Axis policy had already been officially introduced at this point. From a purely sporting point of view, however, the Anglo-Saxons and first and foremost the American team would have been eligible for this unusually enthusiastic reception.

No, if the German public favored the French in particular with this homage, it expressed a spontaneous sympathy for France, which showed how strongly the idea of understanding had already taken root in the broadest strata of the German people.

Under a dictatorship, was such popular sentiment to be accorded importance and influence? Official French foreign policy answered this question in the negative. I once drew the attention of a French diplomat friend of mine to the fact that the official authorities did not interfere with, and in some cases even encouraged, initiatives for understanding in Germany aimed at capturing the broad masses, while the Quai d'Orsay was still protesting against the large meeting of front-line fighters in Besancon on the eve of the rally.

veto and insisted that the work of the "Comite France-Alle- magne" remain "in small committee" in the truest sense of the word. "In an authoritarian state," I was told, "it doesn't matter what the people think and feel about a neighboring country; if the government wants to, it can turn the wheel at any moment and in any direction it wishes. But if a democratic government allows the propaganda of understanding with a neighboring country to gain too much ground among its people, it runs the risk of no longer having its people behind it if the national interest should make war with that neighboring country necessary.

This point of view could not be entirely dismissed, but undoubtedly went far too far in its conclusions. Certainly, in an authoritarian regime the dictator hovers over the country like a cloud that makes good weather or discharges storms, without the will of the people having much say in this meteorology of the higher powers. But just as there are interrelationships between the cloud and the land beneath it, which are not without influence on the electrical voltage, the atmospheric density and the form of cloud formation, so thoughts, moods and volitional forces rise up from the people to the dictator,

which he cannot cast to the winds. He is as much the creator of public opinion as he is its creature. A monarchical government or a republican government legitimized by the long duration of its institutions is even less dependent for its existence on popular sentiment than a dictator whose rule is based not only on force but also on the personal favour of the masses. The cool reception that the Reich capital gave to the deployment of motorized units during the height of the Sudeten crisis certainly dampened any enthusiasm for war on Hitler's part no less than the French population's rejection of any adventure of this kind could have cooled any enthusiasm for war on Daladier's part.

One view in which I was also not quite able to follow official French policy was their lack of interest in the participation of men from the party in Franco-German understanding initiatives. When a delegation from the "Comite France-Allemagne" returned from the founding ceremony of a branch of the "Franco-German Society", a representative of the Quai d'Orsay reproached them: "Don't you know that almost all the members of this society are National Socialists?" This objection was made at a time when the National Socialist Party had long since become the sole ruling party in the Reich and when it could no longer be seriously expected that an opposition of any kind could oust it from this position. It was therefore essential to interest as many influential men in the party as possible in working towards understanding with France if the solution to the Franco-German question was not to be reserved for war. The fact that the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" had gained numerous and in some cases leading National Socialists as members was therefore, in my opinion, a logical step.

In our opinion, this is not to be regretted, but welcomed and an indispensable prerequisite for the success of their campaign in Germany. Of course, this was especially true for the corporate memberships. Like every totalitarian system, National Socialism had of course filled the boards of all organizations with old, reliable party supporters in the course of its takeover, as I had experienced myself when I was relieved of the chairmanship of the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Karlsruher Jugendbünde". As a result, there was no association of any influence in the Third Reich and not a single professional body that was not headed by National Socialists. To renounce the participation of National Socialists in the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" would have been tantamount to renouncing any broad and deep impact in the mass organizations of the front fighters, the youth, the women, the social welfare organizations and the Labour Front.

However, the importance of the participation of all these organizations in the work of the board of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" was demonstrated by the year 1937, when the International Exhibition in Paris provided an opportunity for even more Franco-German contacts than the previous year with the Olympic Games. The "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" in Berlin and its various branches visited the Paris World Exhibition with large delegations; a week of lectures organized jointly with the "Comite France-Allemagne", the "Journées d'études franco-allemandes", was even included in the official congress calendar of the International Exhibition in Paris. Numerous lectures and cultural events also took place in the provinces under the auspices of the two societies, particularly in connection with arts and crafts exhibitions organized by the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft Berlin" as part of the Lyon Spring Fair and the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft in den Hansestädten" as part of the Marseille Autumn Fair. However, the visits to the Paris World Exhibition, which the "Franco-German Society"

organized for all the leading cadres of the associations that were members of the society, were even more important for communication.

The French government had made a loan of 80 million francs available for German visitors to the International Exhibition in Paris. Berlin's economic departments were understandably inclined to ensure that this loan was taken up by the smallest and most well-funded group of German visitors possible. The "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft", however, took the view that these circles would come to Paris in sufficient numbers of their own accord and despite the foreign exchange restrictions. For the socially more modest strata of the German people, however, the foreign currency loan for a visit to the Paris World Exhibition was a unique opportunity that could not be allowed to remain unused for the work of understanding. I therefore intervened on the part of the Ribbentrop office in the question of encrypting the foreign currency and succeeded in ensuring that a large part of the credit for travel applications from the "Franco-German Society" was kept open.

Thanks to this arrangement, the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" was able to bring all board members of the associations affiliated with it corporately down to the lowest divisions in the Gau and districts - i.e. practically the entire middle and lower leadership corps of all organized Germans - to the World Exhibition in Paris. The largest contingent, of course, was made up of the professional working classes, who were thus able to gain a direct personal impression of the high level of craftsmanship and diligence of their professional comrades in the neighboring country in the French exhibition halls. But the other corporations and organizations also sent large delegations recruited from all parts of the Reich to the Paris World Exhibition, and the "Comite France-Allemagne" generously ensured that they also found close personal contact with the French corporations and organizations working on parallel goals.

When Baldur von Schirach informed Hitler that he had summoned over ten thousand leaders and sub-leaders of the Hitler Youth to visit the Paris World Exhibition and wanted to travel to Paris himself to deliver the invitation of the Reich Youth leadership to the "Comite France-Allemagne" for a trip to Germany by a thousand French sons of front-line fighters in 1938, he did not meet with undivided approval. "Once the German boys have seen Paris," Hitler said, half sulking, half joking, "they won't like Berlin any more. And they will be disappointed by the invitation of a thousand young Frenchmen to Germany."

However, the Reich Youth Leader was not dissuaded from his plan. A Catholic priest who belonged to the "Comite France-Allemagne" and was very much in favor of Germany set up a large youth hostel and restaurant in his parish not far from the Gare de l'Est especially for the young visitors from the Reich, which was very popular immediately after the opening of the Paris World's Fair. Baldur von Schirach issued the invitation to the thousand French front-line fighters' sons to travel to Germany in October 1937 at a reception held in his honour by the "Comite France-Allemagne", whose secretaries general Jean Goy and Elenri Pichot immediately passed it on to the youth organizations of their front-line fighters' associations. The previous month, all the regional leaders of the Hitler Youth and the heads of the Reich Youth leadership had arrived in Paris for a visit of several days to the World Exhibition. It goes without saying that I took special care of these forty-odd visitors - the highest leadership corps of 12 million young Germans - and was anxious to ensure that they gained as vivid a picture of Paris and France as possible, free of prejudice.

I was probably not mistaken in thinking that the special Franco-German significance of the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 was just as obvious.

was like that of the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany. While the French team was the focus of public interest there, the same was the case here with the German pavilion. Its slender tower, crowned with the imperial eagle, dominated the exhibition grounds and, with its elongated hall structure, blended pleasingly into the perspective of the Avenue de Tokyo and into the overall picture of the large terraces between the Trocadero and the Seine, which had been redesigned in a modern style for the world exhibition. In front of the tower, to the left and right of the entrance, stood two massive large sculptures of Thorak, while inside the vestibule to the hall a pensive sculpture by Kolbe had been placed, as if to symbolize the fact that behind the turmoil of the empire's external development of power, German inwardness was still asserting its quiet rights. The samples of German industrial products on display attracted just as many visitors as the film, music and theater performances in the German pavilion. The elegant rooftop restaurant with its sweeping view over the Seine was the busiest of all the restaurants at the world exhibition. Hardly an evening went by without the "Comite France-Allemagne" being able to show guests from the "Franco-German Society" the cityscape of Paris from this lofty height.

One of the traditional items on the program put together by the "Comite France-Allemagne" for visiting groups from the Reich was a tour of Versailles followed by a reception in the town hall. The Versailles City Council was largely made up of front-line fighters and was keen to ensure that as many Germans as possible associated the name Versailles with different and more pleasant ideas than those attached to it on the other side of the Rhine. As I had personally accompanied several important groups of visitors from the "Franco-German Society" to Paris, I also took part in these visits and receptions in Versailles on several occasions.

At one point, after our tour of the Palace of Versailles and its magnificent gardens, we were also taken through the old Foreign Ministry of the French kings, which was located near the town hall and now served as the municipal library. In keeping with the Ancien regime's preference for a clear layout and uncluttered organization, a large square room in each of the halls was reserved for a particular foreign country, after which it was named. Right in the middle of each of these rooms stood the desk of the head of department and, at a respectful distance from it, the desks of the subordinate officials and assistants. Shelves were set into all four walls from floor to ceiling, which could be closed with latticework and on which the files belonging to the regional department were stored. Above the two passage doors of each of these rooms, however, paintings with characteristic motifs of the country in question were set into the wood paneling. The two "panneaux" of the "salle d'Allemagne" depicted Berlin and Vienna. Berlin with a group of grenadiers exercising in front of the city skyline, Vienna with a landscape painter sitting in front of the city skyline, sketching the beautiful picture presented to him on an easel.

My companions seemed to have overlooked the fact that this "salle d'Allemagne" included the old imperial capital as well as the new one, and I was discreet enough to keep my discovery to myself.

I only remembered them again six months later, when the reunification of Austria with the rest of Germany made political waves in France that threatened to bury the "Comite France-Allemagne". Under the impression of the Anschluss, it canceled the trip to

Germany of the thousand French sons of front-line fighters, which had already been prepared in every detail, at the request of the Quai d'Orsay. Comte de Brinon, to whom Hitler had declared a few years earlier that he was not considering the annexation of Austria to Germany, felt personally betrayed by the Anschluss and resigned his vice-presidency of the "Comite France-Allemagne". However, when he witnessed Hitler's entry into Vienna and the never-ending cheers of the crowds in front of the Hotel Imperial as a special correspondent for his Parisian paper, he began to no longer judge the issue exclusively from the French perspective. When the French government itself, under Prime Minister Leon Blum, finally recognized the annexation de facto and de jure, de Brinon did not want to be more pontifical than the Pope and rescinded his resignation from the "Comite France-Allemagne".

As early as May, a branch of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" (German-French Society) was opened in Vienna, which immediately met with great interest in the city and country due to the old and close cultural ties between the German Ostmark and France. The founding ceremony took place in one of the most beautiful historical halls of the Hofburg; the ceremonial address was given by the Parisian Germanist Henri Lichtenberger, who was no stranger to Vienna.

Almost at the same time, a "Franco-German Society in the Rhineland" was founded in Cologne, and the highlight of the annual work in 1938 was a cultural conference in Baden-Baden in July, jointly organized by the "Franco-German Society" and the "Comite France-Allemagne".

Eight years had passed since the youth and student leaders of the two countries had come together for their first meeting in the same Black Forest landscape, on the Sohlberg not far from the spa town. They had moved from the youth hostel to luxurious hotels, the folk songs at the edge of the forest and the amateur dramatics around the campfire had given way to performances in the concert hall and on the cultivated theater stage. But the spirit of the times had remained the same. And even if the work had grown far beyond the scope of the former youth debate, the old guard of the Sohlberg circle was still sufficiently represented at the Baden-Baden meeting, just as its organizational implementation was in the hands of the Karlsruhe board of the "German-French Society in Baden".

The lecture program of the congress dedicated one day each to an important cultural area. Both the German and French universities, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute and the Academie fran^aaise provided the relevant speakers from their ranks. In the round dance of the muses

Hellenic custom, the art of cooking was also duly celebrated. The great Parisian gastronome Professor de Pomiane had taken on the task of introducing the congress participants to the secret recipes of his science in a lecture with demonstrations, an undertaking that was particularly popular with the female guests, but to which unfortunately only the old hostel parents from the youth hostel on the Sohlberg had been forgotten to be invited.

One of the first congress days was devoted to the question of sport in youth and popular education. Leni Riefenstahl gave explanations of her beautiful film about the Berlin Olympics. The French representative on the International Olympic Committee, Marquis Melchior de Polignac, offered an overview of the development and organization of

physical culture in France, while the commendable representative of German sport, Dr. Carl Diem, undertook the same task for Germany. After the presentations, the auditorium was invited to take a short evening stroll along the Lichtentaler Allee, where, after passing the sports fields on the banks of the Oos, they were surprised by the inauguration of a monument to Pierre de Coubertin.

The minutes leading up to the unveiling of this monument were some of the most anxious I have ever experienced. The idea of erecting the Coubertin monument had only occurred to me a few hours before I left Berlin for Baden-Baden. I immediately telephoned the mayor of the spa town, who fortunately had a perfect spot for the monument above the sports facilities. It didn't require any terracing work and was even surrounded by a hedge that had been planted a long time ago. The mayor of Baden-Baden kindly took on the task of ordering a man-sized granite plinth by telephone, on which a local stonemason chiseled the five Olympic rings and the inscription "To the innovator of the Olympic Games Pierre de Coubertin / The German-French Cultural Conference Baden-Baden July 1938".

All that was missing was the most important thing: the bust. A friend who was well versed in the sculptor circles of the imperial capital volunteered to find one in the given haste. He really did bring an artistically very successful bust to the train for departure, but we were not sure whether it represented Pierre de Coubertin. The only Berlin sculptor who was reputed to have portrayed him during the 1936 Olympic Games was on a study trip abroad, and it was not certain whether the bronze selected from the numerous other finished portrait busts in his studio was the one we were looking for. There was no longer enough time to obtain an illustrated publication about the Olympic Games for comparison, and the distinguished guest of honor had lingered in the officials' stand in the stadium, too far away for his face to be remembered. We therefore took the sculpture with us to Baden-Baden, where it was immediately added to the base of the monument the following day.

You will understand that at the inauguration ceremony I listened to the rhythmic performances of a gymnastics team from the League of German Girls and the playing of I watched the two national anthems with some impatience, which increased when the cover of the monument, decorated with the German and French colors, fell. I was saved - Marquis Melchior de Polignac and Dr. Carl Diem, both long-time collaborators of Pierre de Coubertin, did not show the slightest disconcertment. They were even full of words of appreciation about the portrait resemblance of the bust of their great and revered friend who had died the previous year.

Rarely in the world has a monument been planned, erected and dedicated as quickly as the Coubertin Monument in Baden-Baden, and to my knowledge it remains the only one of its kind in the world. When I was taken from the Konstanz district prison to Baden-Baden at the beginning of November 1945 to be transported on to Paris, the police car took the Lichtentaler Allee for some distance. As I drove past, I glanced at the memorial greeting me from the grounds a few meters to the side of the road, where two officers of the French occupying army were paying their respects. May it not just be a "memorial" to the sporting spirit that Pierre de Coubertin wanted to renew between peoples with the Olympic Games.

After the lectures and events in the city, a region as blessed with scenic beauty as Baden naturally also tempted the participants of the "German-French Society" to go on excursions and tours in the surrounding area, and they made ample use of this opportunity. The longest

of these excursions was by coach to Schwetzingen, where the Mannheim Municipal Stage gave visitors a perfect guest performance of Gluck's "Pilgrims" in the rococo theater of the palace. The return journey went via Heidelberg, in whose dreamy alleyways some of the French conference participants were able to refresh old study memories.

Many members of the "Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft" and the "Comite France-Allemagne" were to bid each other farewell forever at the conclusion of the Baden-Baden conference. Professor von Arnim fell in June 1940 at the head of his battalion not far from the same city of Reims that he had called on to surrender as a young lieutenant at the beginning of the First World War. Reichskriegsopferführer Oberlindober died in an internment camp after the German collapse. Professor Grimm, like many board members of the "Comite France-Allemagne", had to endure years of imprisonment. The front-line fighter leader Jean Goy died under mysterious circumstances during the war; the front-line fighter Henri Pichot and Professor Fourneau died soon after the "liberation". Comte de Brinon was shot in 1947 for "collaborating with the enemy". Many other Parisian writers and journalists who believed they had to serve the idea of Franco-German understanding in both war and peace met the same fate. It is not always without danger to be the forerunner of an idea.

September 1938 saw the inauguration of the "Deutsch- Französische Gesellschaft im Rhein-Maingebiet" (German-French Society in the Rhine-Main Region) in Frankfurt. numerous delegates from French professions had come to the "City of German Crafts". A special steamer took the French guests from Mainz to Cologne after the end of the founding events, from where they continued their return journey by night train to Paris. As the ship, with the tricolour on its mast, passed through one of the narrows of the Rhine valley at around midday, a military train fully loaded with troops and artillery approached it on the bank - the Sudeten crisis had intensified and the march up the West Wall had begun.

When the ship and the train were at the same level in the narrow valley, the young people crowded around all the carriage windows to shout and wave greetings to the ship's guests, whom they recognized as French. Did this symbolize the Franco-German relationship of those years? A great understanding between the peoples, a great misunderstanding between the states - the gulf between the two grew ever wider. But even on the eve of the catastrophe, goodwill greeted each other across the Rhine.

The doves of peace on the Arc de Triomphe

One Sunday morning, when Commandant L'Hôpital was still president of the "Comite France-Allemagne", I walked with him across the Place de l'Etoile. From the Arc de Triomphe, pigeons fluttered down onto the square, where little boys in their Sunday best threw them chunks of their breakfast bread. "You see," my companion remarked to me, "on this same Sunday morning that the French youth are feeding the doves of peace, the youth in Germany are marching through the woods and preparing for war." - "I don't know," I replied to Foch's former adjutant, who had also led the Scouts de France for several years, "whether the pre-military education of German youth goes any further than that of the scouts in other countries. Unfortunately, their doves of peace nest on the Arc de Triomphe." - We agreed that peace should not only be what one imagines it to be, but should also be a little like what the other person imagines it to be.

How did the French and Germans view the Treaty of Versailles?

In the opinion of many French people, Versailles had also brought many injustices. But they were convinced that the treaty had eliminated even greater injustices. They feared that the removal of a single stone could cause the entire treaty to collapse.

The Germans did not see the Treaty of Versailles as a peace building, but as a Procrustean bed. In order to force Germany, which had been created too large by nature, into it, they thought, its limbs had simply been chopped off; the countries that were deemed too small, however, had been unnaturally elongated, so that in entities such as Poland or Czechoslovakia, the national minorities far outnumbered the ruling government people. If it was questionable whether this would be beneficial to the health of such states in the long term, there could have been no doubt from the outset that the mutilated Germany would be eager to heal its bleeding borders with the vitality it had left.

The economic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles also seemed no less violent and unrealistic to the Germans. The Germans pointed out that the tribute demanded from Germany exceeded the entire gold reserves of the world - victors, vanquished and neutrals included - by one and a half times. They were outraged that the war guilt thesis used to justify German reparations was still being upheld even when international historians had long since refuted the claim that Germany was solely or even predominantly to blame for the war. They blamed the reparations payments for the increasingly worsening German economic crisis with its millions of unemployed.

The French proved that Germany had taken out more foreign loans than it had paid in reparations since Versailles. The causes of the German economic crisis lay in the world economy and could not be sought in reparations payments. In Wiesbaden in 1921, Minister Loucheur had agreed to the German proposal to make good the war damage with labor and payments in kind. But England had objected to this arrangement, which was acceptable to the German economy. France, which had been hit by German invasions three times in the course of a century and had been devastated more than any other country in the last war, could not possibly finance its reconstruction from its budget, especially as it was not released from its own debt obligations to its former allies.

The three invasions - countered the Germans - were certainly effective propaganda, but this argument did not stand up to the light of accurate historical research. In 1814, it had

been a matter of pursuing the Napoleonic armies that had invaded the territory of the Reich following a war declared by France, a pursuit in which, incidentally, Russian and English contingents had also taken part alongside the Prussian and Austrian contingents. In 1870, too, it was not Germany but France that had declared war, as it wanted to put a stop to German unification efforts. If, in the course of the fighting, the fortunes of war had favored German arms, the resulting invasion of France could not be blamed on Germany. This left only one invasion whose responsibility could be discussed, that of 1914. The declaration of war in 1914 had indeed come from Germany, but as an unavoidable consequence of the previous mobilization of Russia, with which France had concluded a military alliance that automatically came into force. This military alliance, which was only one link in a general policy of encirclement against the Reich, had caused and triggered the war of 1914. The rising Germany had been begrudged both its national unity and its economic prosperity and had only waited for an opportunity to destroy both. France was obsessed with the idea that a strong, united Germany could have no other thought than to attack its western neighbor. History showed that in the two centuries after the Thirty Years' War, during which France was the stronger power, French armies had undertaken more than thirty invasions on German soil; but in the long preceding centuries, in which the empire had held the upper hand, it had never abused its power to wage war on France in order to dispute its national rights.

It may be - the French conceded - that the France of Louis XIV and Napoleon wanted to smash the empire and hold it down by all means, because it saw it as an obstacle to the establishment of French hegemony over Europe. But today's France was far removed from such plans for power. It wanted nothing more than to go about its work in peace and quiet. However, it also attached no importance to living in a Europe under German domination, and a neighbor as militaristic and treaty-breaking by nature as Germany required France to be concerned about its security. The fact that France wanted nothing but peace was clear from the fact that it had invested almost all of its military budget in the construction of the purely defensive Maginot Line and unreservedly agreed to any plan that would guarantee European security on a collective basis under the international authority of the League of Nations in Geneva. But why was Germany conducting such a fierce polemic against the idea of collective security and the Geneva institution if, as it claimed, it was genuinely concerned about peace?

The idea of an international institution that judges and settles conflicts between states has been with us for a long time - replied the Germans. Our language has even given it a much more beautiful and deeper expression with the word "League of Nations" than the French with the words "Societe des Nations". The term "Societe" is easily associated with something superficial and mesquine, whereas the word "Bund" is associated with ideas of the deepest, even religious contexts of life. The terms "nation" and "people" are also as different in German perception as something created by man or God is different. But had the Geneva institution become a "union" of peoples in line with these high expectations? Was it not rather a selfish community of interests of the victorious states to uphold the Treaty of Versailles, which even served as the official code of law for the founding of Geneva? Under these circumstances, wasn't every plan for "collective security" emanating from Geneva an internationally disguised revival of the old policy of encirclement against Germany, which had already led to world conflagration in 1914?

As Ribbentrop's adviser to France, I had the opportunity to follow this German-French dialog in circles that regretted its hopelessness, as well as in circles that were unaffected by the fact that no peaceful synthesis could be found between the German and French views.

One foreign policy view expressed in Paris was that "one should only speak to the German predator when all the bars around its cage were closed"; and the pact with Soviet Russia was to serve as the last and strongest of these bars. Germany understandably attached less importance to its intended role in Europe's zoo, especially as, in its opinion, it was not it but the others who had the long teeth.

I can still clearly see Hitler expressing his displeasure with the Franco-Russian pact, which was about to be ratified, to Bertrand de Jouvenel, a representative of "Paris-Soir" on February 21, 1936. "My personal efforts to achieve Franco-German understanding will continue. But my political decisions," he added with an expression of implacable determination, "will have to take account of the changed situation when the pact comes into force." And after referring to the dangers threatening Europe from Russia, he made a final, almost imploring appeal to France: "Let us be friends" - "Soyons amis".

Incidentally, in the same interview Hitler also made a statement that constituted a retraction of "Mein Kampf". Bertrand de Jouvenel had told him that this book was the greatest of the many obstacles to understanding with Germany in France. He asked the author why he did not correct his work if he was interested in improving relations between the two countries. Hitler explained the circumstances of the French invasion, under whose impression he had written the work, and concluded: "I am not a writer, but a statesman. I will write the correction of 'Mein Kampf' in the book of history." When the interview was published on the first page of all German newspapers, these passages that practically revoked "Mein Kampf" were also reproduced unabridged and with large headlines.

In Paris, the publication of this interview was to encounter unusual difficulties. Although the majority in the Chamber for the ratification of the Russian Pact could not be in doubt, the French government had nevertheless ensured that Hitler's statements were not published until after the vote had ended. Since I had introduced Bertrand de Jouvenel to Hitler on February 21 and the French journalist had to travel back immediately afterwards, Ribbentrop instructed me to personally bring the fair copy of the Führer's interview, which had been submitted once again for final approval, to Paris. I witnessed on the spot how the publication was delayed for almost a week. When it became known in the night hours of February 27 that the Chamber had ratified the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact, Ribbentrop called me from Berlin and informed me that Hitler was withdrawing his interview. I set off early the next morning to inform the editors of "Paris-Soir". But the hotel bellboy met me on the stairs with a large copy of "Paris-Midi" containing the interview. The paper, which belonged to the same owner, had already been printed at night and had thus been able to publish the Führer's statement before any German objection had been possible.

Hitler was very upset about the treatment of his interview. He was particularly irritated by an article in "Oeuvre", which implied that the Führer's declarations had been made after the ratification of the Russian Pact.

Those who feared that Hitler would be provoked by the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact, wrote the paper, were therefore mistaken. On the contrary, the conclusion of this pact had intimidated the master of the Third Reich. Never before had he gone so far in his offers

of friendship to France as he did in this interview. Given Hitler's psychological disposition, such language was the last thing you were allowed to use with him, even and especially if you "didn't want to talk to him".

I witnessed March 7 in Paris with its "symbolic" invasion of the Rhineland by German units and the threat of a "symbolic" invasion of the Saar region by French units. The big news of the day came to me through a small radio in a cab. While searching for music, the driver had touched the wave on which the French chamber music session was being broadcast. Only a few seconds, but they allowed me to catch the rhetorical climax of Sarraut's speech. "It is intolerable that Strasbourg is under the fire of German cannons." Then a radio station with a music program came on again. But the words stayed with me. In my mind's eye, I saw the hundreds of flourishing villages and small towns of the Baden homeland that lay in the firing range of the Maginot Line's gun barrels. Were only the German cannons loaded with shells?

The birth of my second child took place in the politically turbulent days following the remilitarization of the Rhineland, and his name was to earn me many a comment in Paris. We had our progenitor, who was born in October 1933, baptized with the old Germanic name "Bernhard", which has remained equally popular in Germany and France. However, my wife and I had agreed on "Sonia" for our daughter, who was expected and arrived in March 1936. Sonja Henie, the Olympic ice skating champion at the recent Winter Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, had inspired us to choose this name. But when the birth announcement of the new baby arrived with our Parisian friends and acquaintances, I was subjected to a lively cross-examination. "You Germans reproach us French for having made a pact with Russia; but you yourselves give your children Russian names!" Fortunately, I was able to prove that Sonia was only an Eastern diminutive of the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom "Sophia" and that "Sophia" had also achieved great renown in the Church. Since antiquity and Christianity are the indisputable roots of our common culture, my reputation as a Westerner was restored.

The remilitarization of the Rhineland triggered a lengthy exchange of notes and opinions between Berlin, London and Paris, which revolved in particular around the question of whether or not the Locarno Agreement had lapsed as a result of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact. Ribbentrop was frequently in England during these days. As he organized his return trips according to where the Führer was staying, he gave me and a few other advisers from his office a rendezvous in Bad Godesberg at the end of March. As a result, we also took part in the first Rhine trip that Hitler made after his return to Germany.

of the German Wehrmacht in the Rhineland. Ribbentrop had been invited to this trip, and because he wanted to continue some meetings with us, he asked us to accompany him.

The trip was kept under the strictest secrecy. But since the Führer's motorcade, known throughout Germany, had driven up the riverbank empty in its large Mercedes cars, word had spread like wildfire throughout the Rhine Valley that Hitler's visit was to be expected. Wherever the ship appeared in populated areas, the riverbanks were filled with cheers, the Rhineland population outdid themselves in outbursts of enthusiasm for their new Lohengrin.

I was more deeply impressed by a farming family: an old man, a haggard woman and a two- or three-year-old child who - probably on their way home from working in the fields

on the other bank - were crossing the river with their farming equipment when the guide's boat crossed their barge. The rumor of the unexpected visit had obviously not yet reached them, because they looked at the steamer with indifferent glances. But suddenly they recognized the guide in the figure standing at the railing in a weather-bleached raincoat, separated from the other passengers. Their faces were suddenly transformed. The two old men jumped up from their seats and burst into tears. Without being able to utter a word, the old man held out his grandson for a blessing to the legendary man who was passing him in the flesh. He forgot himself so much that he almost lost his balance and the boat would have been knocked over by the waves of the steamer. Hitler returned the gesture of boundless trust with a greeting that was more polite than cordial. His gaze was fixed on the distant horizon, where the still barren shores and their ruins stood out darkly against the sky. At that moment, he seemed to me like a stranger in his own realm.

In the summer of the same year, I was able to observe Hitler once at one of the numerous receptions to which the Olympic Games gave rise. It was a garden party at Ribbentrop's house in Berlin-Dahlem. Shortly before, the white tuxedo had been introduced to the party uniform, and the image still stands before my eyes today, as Hitler stepped into the lamplight of the salon in his elegantly tailored summer skirt, kissed the hands of the ladies of Berlin society, the diplomatic corps and the foreign guests of honor with slight bows and then moved across the well-tended lawn between the dark groups of trees and colorful lanterns. This evening he was all Austrian. Leaning casually in a cane armchair, he listened to one of the Empire's first quartets play while the water splashed in the garden fountain, or he indulged in casual conversation with the crowd of fellow guests surrounding him.

And yet, even at that hour, he seemed to me a stranger, a guest from a distant world inhabited by no cheerful spirits, whom a magic carpet from "a night and a night" had brought into the summer evening of this Mark Brandenburg garden. had carried. Were his thoughts on the Olympic flame in the nearby stadium, whose fire marathon runners had carried from Hellas to the imperial capital in a peaceful competition? Were they lingering over the distant Pyrenees, where other torches had been lit, the furies of civil war, and where the first flames of a European war were already flaring up?

At the following Reich Party Congress, Hitler spoke of the cultural community of the "European family of nations" and particularly emphasized how much Germany and France owed each other culturally. One of my duties in the Ribbentrop office was to look after the French guests of honor of the Reich government in Nuremberg. As such, Louis Bertrand from the Academie Fran^aise had also arrived in the Mecca of National Socialism that year. I was curious to see how this dyed-in-the-wool "Latin" would react to the mass demonstrations of Teutonism. He did not pull himself out of the affair unskillfully. When the Reich Labor Service marched onto the party grounds, thirty thousand spades flashed in the sunlight in a single movement and never-ending shouts of salvation announced the Führer's arrival on the grandstand, Louis Bertrand measured the medium-sized figure, bareheaded in a simple brown shirt, with an inquiring gaze as he presented himself to the cheers of the masses. Then he exclaimed with every sign of astonishment: "Mais c'est un latin, un latin parfait."

The outward appearance could indeed invite comparison with an ancient tribune of the

people and conceal the irrationality that connected the magician of Berchtesgaden with the applauding crowd of his party supporters.

There was some profound truth in Louis Bertrand's judgment. Certainly, a world separated Hitler from Latinity; but he was just as little a Germanic. Nowhere was this expressed more drastically than in this scene in the party grounds, where Greek-Roman, if not almost Babylonian-Assyrian, architecture suddenly sprang up just a few kilometers from the gates of one of the most ancient cities of the old German Empire. At the time of the Weimar Republic, which was decried as internationalist, there had been no lack of approaches, even happy approaches, to an architecture that was both contemporary and down-to-earth, to name just the clinker brick buildings of the Hanseatic cities, which combined modern technical daring with a sense of tradition in form and material. Hitler's architecture, however, only had the gray sandstone that uniformly clad it in common with Germany. While private houses and remote buildings, such as the barracks of the Wehrmacht and the Ordensburg, sought to tie in with traditional forms tied to the landscape, Italian palazzi and Greek temples rose up on the representative building sites of the Third Reich, without any visible attempt by Schinkel or Weinbrenner to adapt the foreign models to the Nordic sky and frame.

The picture was the same in painting. What caught the eye in Hitler's rooms in the Reich Chancellery and at the Berghof were masters of Italian Renaissance. At best, German painters found favor with the political motif, such as Defregger's "Letztes Aufgebot". Hitler obviously wanted to re-establish the natural-evenness of the ancient Mediterranean ideal of beauty in art. Therefore, when the National Socialist Minister of the Reich, Rust, declared at the opening of a French painting exhibition in Berlin that National Socialism, in its fight against "degenerate" art, had not torn apart the connection with the European cultural community, but had restored it, he was not wrong from his point of view.

The Nordic people have an innate inclination towards expressive art. It was no coincidence that Expressionism found its home and widest dissemination in Germany, just as, conversely, "cultural Bolshevism" has nowhere remained more unknown than in the Soviet Union. An aesthetic based exclusively on the concept of beauty of the Mediterranean may doubt that Germanic people can paint, but it cannot doubt that van Gogh, whose works Hitler had banned from German museums, was the most Germanic of modern painters.

"But the music", "Hitler's cult of Richard Wagner", many foreigners will object. Well, there are Germans, and not the worst of them, who see in the works of Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, which remained closed to Hitler, a more characteristic musical expression of their nation and for whom the least Germanic thing about the great master of Bayreuth seems to be his motifs borrowed from the world of Nordic legends. Let us not forget that Hitler's preference was not only for Richard Wagner but also for Richard Strauss and - Franz Leh. tr. Wherever we look, southern and eastern traits secretly emerge in this fanatic of the Nordic race. And if not only Rome, but also Byzantium, which is already half oriental, can be counted as part of the Latin world, Louis Bertrand's exclamation no longer seems quite so paradoxical: "mais c'est un latin."

In terms of foreign policy, 1937 was a "quiet" year between Germany and France. With the strong participation of the Reich in the Paris World Exhibition and the non-binding

discussion between Leon Blum and Dr. Schacht on the German colonial question, it even brought a certain relaxation.

For me personally, on the other hand, this year has been less peaceful. I got into a very heated argument with circles in the party that were hostile to me. Since moving from Karlsruhe, I had not only made friends in Berlin. Just a few days after I moved to the Reich capital, officials from the secret police asked the landlady about a newly drafted "Dr. Sohlberg", but with the best will in the world she was unable to provide any information about a person by that name. When I appeared in public for the first time on November 12, 1934, during a lecture by Jules Romains in the university's Alte Aula, a party functionary wanted to ask the French speaker

Baldur von Schirach had me arrested in the middle of the hall. Although I never behaved in a hostile manner towards the party and only ever expressed criticism openly, the subterranean agitation against me continued in the years that followed.

When Ribbentrop took up his London ambassadorial post at the end of 1936 and was therefore often absent from Berlin for long periods, my opponents believed the moment had come for a general attack. They launched it in the spring of 1937 with a large-scale smear campaign. I was accused of being both an Alemannic separatist and General von Schleicher's southwest German confidant in the "Reichskuratorium für Jugendertüchtigung" (Reich Board of Trustees for Youth Training), which would not have been entirely compatible. In addition to anti-party and anti-state behaviour in general, I was accused in particular of being the agent of the Parisian "Grand Orient" with the Reich government, of maintaining close ties with Jewish emigrants and of sympathizing with left-wing parties. The accusations of patriotic pacifism and treasonous Francophilia were self-evident.

I perhaps did not pay the attention to this hooliganism that I deserved. However, when I happened to hear the names of some of the main agitators at the beginning of summer 1937, I let them know what I thought of them - with the help of my South German vocabulary of decorative epithets. This offended some of the higher party leaders personally and influential National Socialist organizations in corpore, which, in addition to several honorary cases, earned me a lengthy trial.

Ribbentrop, in the mistaken belief that this would win him support in the party, had his advisors awarded honorary SS ranks. This placed me under the jurisdiction of the SS, and Himmler forced Ribbentrop to relieve me of all business in the office during the proceedings, which dragged on for several months. The final interrogation took place at the end of October 1937 in the Secret State Police building in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. It was not difficult for me to refute the accusations made against me. If I took the view that the Reich's center of gravity should once again lie more strongly in its historical heartlands, I was in no way misjudging the mission that East Elbe Germany had fulfilled for the history of the Reich at a certain point in time and within a limited framework. As far as Franco-German understanding was concerned, the party believed that it had no more hateful enemies than the Jews, Freemasons and Marxists. It would therefore be difficult to accuse me in one breath of being an ally of these circles and too radical an advocate of Franco-German understanding. Rather, it was the elements of National Socialism that fought against the idea of Franco-German understanding, who were thus indirectly in a front with the Jews, Freemasons and Marxists. When my opponents accuse me of being a

"pacifist" and of having an ideologically anti-National Socialist

To be in contact with other camps would also be a contradiction. Only wanting to maintain contact with like-minded people means avoiding any combative encounters and betrays a pacifism of spirit.

I refrained from elaborating on the question of my personal Jewish relations, although here too it was unjustified to summarily accuse me of being friendly towards Jews. Since Franco-German understanding was at the center of my interests, I had become accustomed to distributing my sympathies and antipathies according to this point of view, regardless of whether they were National Socialists or enemies of the party, Germans or foreigners. Before Hitler came to power, the Jews had been the most passionate champions of Franco-German understanding, but then became its bitterest opponents. This explained why I had so many Jewish friends before 1933 and so few after 1933.

The French Jews and the German Jews who had emigrated to France, with whom I was still in private contact as an employee of Schirach and Ribbentrop, considered the continuation of my Franco-German communication work in the Third Reich to be a delusional idea, but they did not belong to the circles that saw a war against Hitler as the only way out of the European crisis. Since I was accused in this area of having greeted the emigrant Professor Gumbel at the beginning of a lecture and shaking his hand, but I was able to prove that there was no truth in this allegation, no further discussion of the entire charge was made.

I emerged from the proceedings completely vindicated and was able to resume my work in the office undisturbed. However, the incident had made Ribbentrop realize that I was not even a party comrade. Since he had taken me over from the Reich Youth Leadership, he probably assumed that my "National Socialist reliability" had been checked there. He made it compulsory for me to join the party, and in the winter of 1937 I registered with the Zehlendorf branch as a party candidate. Some time later I received a membership book with a higher seven-digit number. I never held a position in the party.

When Ribbentrop was appointed Reich Foreign Minister in February 1938, some of his advisers moved with him to the Foreign Office. I myself remained in the office, but began to work more closely with the official foreign policy of the Reich as the two houses in Wilhelmstrasse continued to work more closely together.

By March 1938, Hitler believed the time had come for the annexation of Austria. As on the lower reaches of the Vistula, Versailles had also created constitutional and territorial conditions on the middle reaches of the Danube which could not be said to represent any progress over the previous situation. In centuries of effort, the Habsburgs' statesmanship had succeeded in forming a large federation from the various ethnic groups settled in the Danube region. Certainly, this

Federation may not have met all the national aspirations of the people united in it. From a European point of view, however, it represented a much more sensible organization of the Danube region than the Treaties of Saint Germain and Trianon. With the elimination of German influence, a new organization of this area could only take place under the sign of Russian Pan-Slavism and Bolshevism.

However, the Paris Suburb Treaties not only cut German-Austria off from its old federal states in the Dual Monarchy, but also prohibited it from returning to the German state union. For twenty years, Vienna and Berlin tried in vain to persuade the Western powers,

and France in particular, to give up this veto. Even the German-Austrian customs union proposed by Reich Foreign Minister Curtius, which Czechoslovakia had also been prepared to accept, was unceremoniously banned by the victorious Versailles powers in Geneva. Hitler was to succeed in doing what the Weimar Republic had been denied. He benefited from the fact that the League of Nations' sanctions policy on the Abyssinia question had driven Mussolini into Germany's arms. Thus, no resistance to the annexation could be expected from the most directly interested foreign power.

The excitement caused in Paris by Austria's reunification with Germany and the repercussions even in the "Comite France-Allemagne" have already been mentioned in the previous chapter.

For my part, I must confess that I found this excitement unjustified. Coming from a region that for centuries had belonged to the Habsburg Crown's Austrian possessions, I felt just as much, if not more, attached to the old imperial capital of Vienna than to the new imperial capital of Berlin. I also hoped that the annexation would bring a happier balance between the southern German and northern German elements in the empire, all the more so as I had already seen the Austrian Hitler's seizure of power in Prussia in 1933 as a kind of "revanche pour Sadova".

In terms of domestic politics, it would certainly have been desirable if the Anschluss had been a success for republican rather than National Socialist Germany, i.e. if it had taken place in 1919, when the Socialist Reichstag President Löbe was still leading the German League for the Anschluss. In a referendum on reunification with Germany, the Austrian Prime Minister and Socialist leader Karl Renner had received no less an overwhelming majority of votes than Adolf Hitler in 1938. In Austria, soon after the Anschluss, the joking phrase was to circulate: "We believed that National Socialism was a world view; only now do we realize that it is a strain". However, after the Austrians had given Germany one of their compatriots as a dictator, it was only compensatory justice that they received him back in the same capacity through the Anschluss.

Vienna had given the empire the key to the economic development of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Here lay its natural agricultural supplementary areas, which at the same time provided a lack of markets for its industrial production. Within a year, the import and export business with Germany had already taken first place in the foreign trade of all the Balkan countries. Gone were the days when the Romanian wheat surpluses urgently needed by Germany and promised to it in exchange for its industrial products were sent to France to strengthen the Little Entente, which itself had to denature large parts of its own wheat harvest due to sales difficulties. Was it to be hoped that Western Europe would resign itself to a further economic expansion of the Reich in the Danube countries and that Hitler would be content with this peaceful penetration of the German "living space" in the East?

England had very strong private-sector interests in south-eastern Europe; for the French state budget, the countries of the Little Entente and Poland were more of a burden. However, these countries were bound to lose military alliance value for France to the extent that their economic and thus also political relations with Germany improved. Hitler himself thought too much in terms of military policy to be able to adopt the principle once established in the Weimar Republic that "economy is destiny" without reservation. The völkisch orientation of the National Socialist party program also forced him to give first

priority to the question of German minorities in the Reich's Central and Eastern European policy. As he had only been prophesied a short lifespan, his entire ambition was directed towards reuniting the national minorities bordering on the Reich's territory and striving towards it with Germany in the shortest possible time.

However, as Hitler had inherited the Hohenzollerns as well as the Habsburgs, his inheritance included quite a few outstanding national minorities. He renounced South Tyrol in favor of the Axis policy with Italy. For the Danzig and Corridor question, too, he originally seemed to have in mind a solution in friendly, neighborly agreement with Poland. Hitler would not have been Austrian, however, if he had not taken up the Sudeten question immediately after the Anschluss with all the resentment of a German irredentist of the old Habsburg Empire.

When Czecho-Slovakia was conceived in a political salon on the Boulevard Saint-Germain towards the end of the First World War, its two name components had not yet been merged into one word. However, the pre-natal hyphen was quickly dropped after the foundation of the new state, and the 67 million Czechs did not recognize the 27 million Slovaks as an equal governing people. The 3 7₂ million Germans, who, like 1 million Carpatho-Ukrainians and Hungarians, were also resident in the territory of the Moldavian Republic, were only referred to from the outset as citizens with subordinate rights.

If the political conditions for the coexistence of the various ethnic groups in this area were therefore not favorable, then

the mountains surrounding it undeniably formed a geographical unit. Within the framework of a supranational organization, such as the medieval German Empire, a local state union was possible under such scenic conditions. However, the unrestricted principle of nationality established by the Western democracies had to lead to every ethnic group settled in such an area insisting on its right to self-determination. The Sudeten Germans' right to self-determination demanded their reunification with the Reich. Berlin adopted the demands of the Sudeten Germans as its own and represented them with all the means at its disposal. The Prague government refused to release the Germans from their state union and appealed for military help from Moscow and France when an English mediation proposal adopted the German position. By September 1938, the issue had come to such a head that a European war threatened to break out over it.

In Paris, opinions were divided during the Sudeten crisis. While left-wing circles wanted to maintain the status quo in Czechoslovakia at the price of war, certain groups on the center and right tended towards the English view that Germany's demands should be met. The press also took a passionate interest in this discussion in both camps. My personal point of view was that, according to the right of peoples to self-determination, the question in the first and last instance concerned the Sudeten Germans, about whose will there could no longer be any doubt after Lord Runciman's expert opinion. However, if Hitler really did go to war in order to force the reunification of the Sudetenland with the Reich, then in my eyes he was acting just as criminally as the statesmen in Prague and Paris who wanted to prevent the return of the Sudetenland to Germany by force of war. But if the threats of war on both sides were just a bluff or - as Genevieve Tabouis once aptly put it - a "chantage à la guerre", then this game with fire seemed no less reprehensible to me. How often in history have shotguns gone off by themselves after being carelessly and imprudently loaded? The Sudeten crisis dramatically demonstrated the guilt of the founders of the League of Nations

when they linked the Geneva institution to the Treaty of Versailles and only conceded the possibility of revision on the condition of unanimity. Since revisions of a territorial nature could never count on the vote of the state that was to cede a territory, there was practically no international procedure for modifying the Versailles Treaty, which was based on force, over the course of time in accordance with the principles of law.

In the days when France was moving towards partial mobilization, I had several interesting conversations in Paris with political personalities of all shades - from Paul Reynaud, who was totally committed to the war, to Etienne Flandin, who passionately defended the official English view. The Minister of Pensions, Champetier de Ribes, exclaimed: "Jamais la France ne tolerera qu'on lui tape sur le pied en Tchechoslovaquie". I took the liberty of countering that politeness and gallantry would require us to imagine Marianne, so graceful by nature, with a foot that could reach from Paris to Prague. The Minister of Labor, Anatole de Monzie, who did not have the Czech Prime Minister in his heart, declared: "Whether there will be war or peace, I should in any case be pleased that with your Hitler someone is finally forcing Benesch to keep his word. We never got it done." Edouard Herriot told me an old Celtic legend according to which rose bushes were planted on the graves of Tristan and Isolde, which grew together with their roots underground. In the same way, the German and French peoples only came together in the graves after bloody wars.

On September 28, I was invited to lunch at the home of the future ambassador Henri Bonnet, where servants ostentatiously - perhaps too ostentatiously for the eyes of the German guest - packed the valuables of the home furnishings in large air-raid cases. In the evening hours of the same day, news broke of the convening of the quadripartite conference in Munich. "La paix est sauvee", shouted the people on the street, in the pubs, in the train compartments overcrowded with drafted reservists. "Peace is saved." It had only been given a reprieve.

The Franco-German Declaration of Friendship of December 6, 1938

When Daladier appeared on the balcony of his hotel at the end of the Munich Conference alongside the President of the "Union Federale" of French front-line fighters Henri Pichot, the inhabitants of the Bavarian capital gave him an enthusiastic ovation.

He was less sure of the reception he would receive from the people of Paris. When his plane arrived over Le Bourget, the airfield was surrounded by a huge crowd of people gesticulating vigorously, some of whom had already broken through the barriers. Assuming it was an enemy demonstration, the French Prime Minister allowed the plane to make several circles and even considered landing at Villa-Coublay airfield for a moment. When the plane finally landed at the Bourget at the pilot's insistence, Daladier realized his mistake. The Parisians had not come to lynch him, but to carry him into the city in triumph. The rally, which ended in front of the Arc de Triomphe after a drive through the Champs-Élysées, turned into the most powerful manifestation of the will for peace and understanding that the French capital had ever seen within its walls.

The political circles did not share this enthusiasm of the man in the street, the mothers, wives and daughters of the mobilized soldiers. There was certainly a majority in the Chamber in favor of the Munich Agreement, but the "anti-Munichois" were becoming more polemical by the day, and the English comments on Munich were not conducive to hoping that the meeting of the Four would have a far-reaching positive effect on European politics.

The reception that Munich received in London was in turn reflected in the mood in Germany. Hitler's deplorable speech in Saarbrücken - perhaps even more deplorable because of what he did not say and what was expected to come out of his mouth that day, especially in France - reflected this change of mood in a blatant way. A French senator compared Hitler to a man who had been invited to dinner and who, after finishing his meal, threw the empty plate at his host. The envoy Hewel, who was personally close to Hitler, confided to me that the Saarbrücken speech was originally intended for the Western powers.

friendly passages. However, when the Führer had already entered the speaker's platform, he was presented with an agency report on the Sunday sermon given by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the early hours of the morning, whose outbursts against Germany had then provoked Hitler's outbursts against England.

Chamberlain had, however, brought home a declaration of German friendship from Munich. This also raised the question for the French government of finding a political formula for the new relations with the Reich that had been initiated by the immediate discussion. Berlin shared this wish, and the two governments agreed that the Reich Foreign Minister should sign an agreement in Paris in the first days of December that would confirm the new Franco-German relationship initiated in Munich.

Two events caused the Reich government to temporarily waver in this decision. The first was a general strike by French railroad workers, initiated by the Communist Party,

which was called shortly before the planned date of Ribbentrop's Paris visit and which Berlin interpreted as a demonstration against the intended contact. Daladier, however, brought the strike movement to a halt by the last means available to the French government, the application of the mobilization order for railroad personnel. The second event, much more serious in its psychological consequences and political impact, was the assassination of the German legation councillor vom Rath, which took place in the rooms of the Paris embassy itself a few days before the arrival of the Reich Foreign Minister. The murderer, Grynspan, was a Jew. From this fact, it was only a step for the National Socialist propaganda to claim that French Jewry - if not "world Jewry" - had used this weapon to bring down the planned Franco-German agreement.

As a Jewish assassination attempt against a German had taken place in Davos at the same time, the party organized "spontaneous" rallies against Jews and Jewish businesses in all districts and allowed the anti-Semitic agitation among its supporters to run unhindered. For the first time, National Socialist Germany saw the official toleration of riots that had previously been prevented or - insofar as they had occurred in individual cases - officially denied. The unworthy action, borrowed from Eastern European models, went down in the annals of the Third Reich as the "Day of the German Shards". On this day, however, more was shattered in and for Germany than a few tens of thousands of store windows. A calamity was conjured up that was even more far-reaching than the one hundred thousand Jews.

Grynspan had reached for his revolver when Counselor vom Rath turned his back on him to fill out the usual form for unknown and unannounced visitors at his desk. Most of the shots hit the wall, but one hit vom Rath in the spleen and led to his death two days later. his death. The young civil servant, who had only been on protocol duty in the early hours of the morning, had only recently been transferred to Paris from a German consulate general in India. He was an opponent of National Socialism and, with his innate tendency towards mystical ideas, even saw Hitler as the "Antichrist".

When he was arrested, Grynspan told employees of the German embassy and French police officers that he had wanted to avenge his relatives, who had been deported from their home in Hanover to Poland as Polish citizens. To this end, he had gone to the German Embassy to shoot the first best official he came across. - Before this murder, the situation of the Jews in Poland, which was supported by the Western powers, would have been even less enviable than in Nazi Germany, which was attacked by the Western powers for its anti-Semitism.

The search for possible backers of Grynspan was unsuccessful; the question of whether he acted purely on his own initiative or on behalf of others has remained unanswered.

However, could the murder of the envoy councilor vom Rath be a reason to cancel the Reich Foreign Minister's trip to Paris? If the act of murder was based on the political intention of anonymous circles to prevent this visit, then it was acting in accordance with their will if it was canceled. However, if the event was merely an act of private revenge, there was even less reason to question the signing of the Franco-German Declaration of Friendship because of it. Ribbentrop did not ignore these considerations, and so the German delegation's special train rolled towards its destination on the night of December 4-5.

After a strange detour in the Parisian ring road, in the course of which the most peculiar

and geographically opposite suburbs were touched, the journey came to an end in the small station reserved for state visits at the "Invalides" station. The protocol of the Quai d'Orsay was on hand with a large contingent, and Georges Bonnet had personally come onto the platform to greet his German guests. The delegation was accommodated in the Hotel Grillon, which was surrounded by a dense police cordon. The government cars made available to the delegation had unmistakable armor plating. Extraordinary precautions were also taken in other respects. Wherever the delegation went in pursuit of the program set out for them, they were separated from the public by barriers on the streets, and the large Konkordienplatz was always deserted during the journeys to and from the hotel.

The abundance of faces crowding around the German guests at the invitations and receptions was all the more confusing. Daladier and Bonnet had invited them to state banquets, the "Comite France-Allemagne" and the front-line fighters' organizations had organized a breakfast. Finally, Count Welczeck gave a grand reception in the festive rooms of the German Embassy.

evening reception, which was attended by "tout Paris". Ribbentrop was visibly impressed that he had achieved the social success at the Faubourg Saint-Germain with which the London gentry had been stingy.

The signing of the Franco-German Declaration of Friendship took place on December 6, 1938 at 11 a.m. in the historic "Salon d'Horloge" of the Quai d'Orsay. The relatively large room could barely contain the crowd of journalists who attended the ceremony with the members of the German delegation and the staff of the French Foreign Office. When Georges Bonnet and Ribbentrop signed their names under the document, there was such a breathless silence that you could hear the quills gliding over the paper.

In the mutual declaration of friendship, Germany and France undertook to recognize their common border as definitive and to consult each other in a spirit of good neighbourliness if international differences arose that affected the interests of the two countries. The possibility of economic cooperation in the African colonial territories was also mentioned.

In Berlin's eyes, the recognition of Germany's western border was of particular importance, as it was not the result of a dictate, as had been the case at Versailles, but was based on a free decision by the Reich. The French were not dissatisfied either. After National Socialist Germany had taken the Franco-Soviet pact as an opportunity to terminate the Locarno Agreement, it had now voluntarily renewed the decisive provision of this agreement, the guarantee of the Franco-German border. After signing the declaration of friendship, the German delegation and their French partners parted with satisfied smiles and hearty handshakes to quickly change their clothes for the lunch given by Daladier.

When they met for dinner an hour and a half later, the atmosphere was transformed. The host presided over the table with a distraught face, and the expressions on the faces of his cabinet members and secretaries were one of embarrassed silence. Despite the most exquisite hors d'oeuvres and the most stimulating drinks, the conversation only got off to a halting and awkward start. Since, as we all know, questions are never indiscreet, only answers at best, I expressed my astonishment at the sudden drop in the barometer to a French person sitting next to me. - "Yes, haven't you heard the news from Italy yet?" - "No, what you're implying is the first word."

Between fish and roasts, I learned that a large demonstration had taken place in front of the French embassy in Rome that morning. At exactly the same hour that Berlin and Paris had declared peace and friendship in the "Salon d'Horloge" of the Quai d'Orsay, the windows of the Palazzo Farnese had been filled with shouts of "Nice-Savoy-Corsica-Tunis" from fascist chanting choirs. What had been denied to the other side of the barricade, to the strike slogan of the communist railroad workers and Grynspan's revolver. The jealousy of the Axis partner was to succeed. Although the Franco-German declaration of friendship had come about, its charm was broken.

When Ribbentrop learned after Tisch of the incident in Rome, which had certainly not been synchronized by chance, his first concern was that Goebbels' press might take up the Italian claims and publish them in large print. He instructed the envoy Hewel to convey his fears to Hitler by telephone and to suggest that he give contrary instructions to the German newspapers. The porter of the Maxim, who registered Hewel's long-distance call at cocktail hour, probably had no idea that he was making the connection with a secret number of the Führer's adjutant's office.

On the afternoon of December 6, a joint working meeting was held on the economic rapprochement between the two countries and the reconciliation of their interests in the field of colonial raw materials procurement. It was conducted in a friendly tone, but did not essentially go beyond the usual Franco-German economic and trade discussions.

The next day, the German special train left Paris, which was shrouded in fog and rain, by the same circuitous rail route on which it had arrived. One image of this departure stayed with me, which made me regret the complete isolation of the German delegation from the French population. At the exit, I don't remember which suburb, a multi-storey factory building stretched along the railroad tracks. When the special German train came into view, the factory windows were filled with men and women in white work blouses, and the bright dots of hundreds of waving handkerchiefs still greeted us from afar in the gray of the winter morning, when the train had already left the French capital behind.

These workers may have heeded their party leaders' call for a European civil war against fascism tomorrow. But at the bottom of their hearts, they harbored just as little enmity against their neighbor across the Rhine as Adolf Hitler's soldiers, who had greeted a delegation of Frenchmen on their way to the West Wall during the height of the Sudeten crisis.

In 1936, at the height of the Franco-German understanding between front-line fighters, I once spoke about the German youth movement at the "Rive Gauche" lecture series in Paris. Before I spoke, Henri de Montherlant said a few introductory words whose nobility captivated me as much as their skepticism choked me. He declared that he did not believe in the understanding of peoples between whom fate had put the sword. The most that could be hoped for, he said, was a chivalrous greeting before taking up arms and perhaps also the demonstration of a certain mutual respect during hostilities, such as might be expressed in the treatment of prisoners of war.

Montherlant's thoughts had seemed all too literary to me at the time, and even now I couldn't make friends with her pessimism. Should the French-German understanding really be nothing more than soldiers sending chivalrous greetings to the enemy during a mobilization, workers on the eve of a possible conflict?

To illustrate his thoughts, Henri de Montherlant had used the image of the Japanese

samurai who were surprised by a storm on the way to the dueling ground and one of whom let the other go under his umbrella before they engaged in a deadly duel. - Was Chamberlain's Munich umbrella spun from the same silk?

Did the worldly-wise French Foreign Office use to conclude its international agreements in a "clock room" as a reminder of the transience of all things temporal? The Franco-German Declaration of Friendship of December 6, 1938 was not even granted the two years that historians have calculated as the average lifespan of treaties concluded between nations for an "indefinite period". It had already become irrelevant after just one hour.

The Munich policy and the resulting Franco-German declaration of friendship were based on the idea of the so-called "repli imperial". The Parisian "munichois" said to themselves that the revision of Germany's eastern borders and Germany's natural predominance in its central and eastern European sphere of interest could only be halted by a very bloody war with an uncertain outcome. They therefore recommended abandoning the policy of encirclement against the Reich and even considered terminating the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact. In return for the free hand it was granted in the east, Germany guaranteed the status quo on the Rhine. Under this guarantee, France then no longer used its taxpayers' funds à fonds perdu in the Vistula and Danube regions, but used them for the political, military and economic organization of its own vast empire, whose sources of aid were still largely untapped. In this way, Germany and France would no longer have stood in each other's way and could have established a lasting good neighborly relationship on the Rhine.

However, the Roman claims to Nice, Savoy, Corsica and Tunis now burst like a bomb into this balancing of national interests that had been initiated between Berlin and Paris. The war with Germany, which the reorientation of French policy seemed to have averted, could now break out in a roundabout way via Italy. National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy had made no lack of announcements that they formed an "axis" in European politics, and Hitler's personal relationship with Mussolini was also the closest imaginable. If a conflict arose between Rome and Paris, it was difficult to assume that Berlin would give priority to the Franco-German declaration of friendship of December 6, 1938 over the "iron pact" with fascism.

Faced with this alternative, the "munichois" also believed they had to return to the traditional system of French alliances in Eastern Europe.

The attitude in London also stiffened noticeably. If Britain had made a great contribution to peace in September 1938, it was mainly because it was not yet sufficiently prepared for war at that time. An opposition that was growing in influence every day urged Downing Street to make up for what it had failed to do.

What was Hitler's misunderstanding when, barely six months after the four-way meeting, he addressed both the Polish and Czech issues with such haste? Did he support or overestimate the change of mood that had taken place in London and Paris in the meantime? Did he believe he had to strike while the iron was hot in Munich or, conversely, was it the fear of victory for the Anglo-French war party that drove him to take such hasty steps in Warsaw and Prague?

The news of the establishment of the Reich Protectorate in Bohemia and Moravia came as a surprise to me on my trip to Florence, where I was spending a few days' vacation at

Easter. While all previous foreign policy initiatives of the German government had seemed justified to me, despite their sometimes questionable form, I found myself in the embarrassing position of not being able to approve of this new action. On my return journey, which took me through France, a member of the "Comité France-Allemagne" gave me an article entitled "The swastika flag flies over Prague - we no longer understand". I had it published in the "Deutsch- Französische Monatshefte", and it was probably the only review on this subject to appear in print in the Third Reich.

Incidentally, my personal opinion was also shared by many convinced National Socialists and by leading figures in Sudeten Germanism itself. The former accused Hitler of betraying his own völkisch principle, which forbade the admission of a population of a foreign race and foreign national sentiment into the German Reich. The latter were of the opinion that even without the agreement imposed on Hacha, it would have been possible to eliminate the disruptive foreign influences in the Czech population and gradually establish the good relationship with them that existed with the Slovak ethnic group from the outset.

In circles that do not consider politics and morality to be incompatible, it was criticized that Hitler used changing points of view to justify his actions, just as the Western powers he accused of hypocrisy did. Just as the latter used natural borders or ethnic affinities, historical or economic and military policy reasons to justify arbitrary territorial expansions, Hitler had invoked ethnic considerations when annexing Austria and the Sudeten Mountains, whereas he was now basing the establishment of the Reich Protectorate in Bohemia and Moravia on military considerations.

The "Czech bastion" undeniably occupied the same dominant position in the German state and national space as the Massif Central in France, for example.

serve as an air base. In the course of its history, no nation state would have merged such a region politically and culturally with itself long ago. However, the old German Empire, with its federalist structure, was far removed from any nationalist intolerance; and even when Prague was the imperial residence for a time, no pressure was exerted to Germanize Bohemia. If tensions arose between the central imperial power and local power groups in this area, they were always only due to the dynastic or - as in the case of the Hussite Wars - religious reasons that were common in feudal times. With regard to the Hussite Wars, the historical curiosity that Germans invoked the help of the Virgin of Orleans - venerated as a saint in the empire from the very beginning and celebrated in mystery plays even after her condemnation - deserves mention. When the fanatical followers of Dr. Hus invaded Bavaria via the Bohemian Forest, the city council of Regensburg sent representatives to France to ask Joan of Arc, who was at the height of her fame, to lead a Christian army against the enemy heretics. The Regensburg legation seems to have missed its high patron saint. However, according to a letter from her confessor Pasquerel, the authenticity of which has not been confirmed, the French national saint heard of the German request by other means before she was captured by the English and agreed to take part in an anti-Hussite crusade.

The crusade ideas that dominated Western democracies in 1939 had less of a Christian background, just as, with the best will in the world, National Socialist Germany could not be seen as a guarantor of the peace of Western Christendom. The solution that Adolf Hitler had given to the Bohemian and Moravian question showed that, despite certain parallels, he was not the heir to the thousand-year-old tradition of the Holy Roman Empire, but the

son of the sectarian nationalism of the 19th century born beyond the German borders. With his actions in Prague, he had also personally lacked elegance in his dealings with his English and French counterparts in Munich.

The dangerous thing about the establishment of the Reich Protectorate in Bohemia and Moravia was not so much that it gave the "anti-Munichers" water on their mill, because these circles had already wanted to go to war with the annexation of the Sudetes, which was completely in line with the right of peoples to self-determination. Those who thought it was okay that by September 1938 3 7₂ million Germans had been forced against their will to live together with 67₂ million Czechs had no right to oppose the fact that in April 1939 67₂ million Czechs were incorporated against their will into a state union with 80 million Germans. Moreover, the centralized state power of the Czechs had not remotely granted the Sudeten Germans the freedoms that were now granted to the Czechs in the Reich protectorate, where they were given complete cultural and administrative autonomy.

If Hitler's actions in Prague evoked such great dangers, it was because of the psychological repercussions on the "Munichers", on Chamberlain and Daladier, who must have felt personally insulted and betrayed. In this case, too, we witnessed the often unfortunate concatenation and misjudgment of cause and effect in international politics. If Hitler seized the Czech bastion in fear of a military threat to the Reich that would be life-threatening in the event of war, this step was bound to arouse the fears of the Western democracies and increase their readiness for war.

In Paris, after the establishment of the Reich Protectorate in Bohemia and Moravia, the last dams that had been protecting the peace collapsed. The Munich party finally changed sides. The "Comite France-Allemagne" fell into a "mise en sommeil". The "Deutsch-Französische Monatshefte", published jointly with its Berlin sister organization, was soon to be banned by official decree. The press unleashed a systematic polemic against all personalities who still spoke out in favor of an understanding with Germany.

In previous years, too, many months and weeks - and especially weekends - had been charged with dangerous political electricity. But even in moments of high tension, there had never been a lack of "fuses" to prevent the "short circuit", the war. After Prague, there were no more fuses in the high-voltage power lines of European politics.

As if there were not yet enough storms gathering over Europe, the danger of a German-Polish conflict over the Gdansk and Corridor issues was also looming ever more threateningly on the horizon.

Residence ban in France

It seems to be part of my personal fate that I am forbidden to stay on either side of the Rhine. The French government opened the round of bans in July 1939, and it took the Western campaign and the occupation of Paris to repeal the measure. After that, it was the German government that repeatedly deemed my stay in France undesirable - once for an entire year. In December 1944, Berlin even forbade me to stay at the headquarters of the French government commission in Sigmaringen, and the gates of the small Danube residence were only open to me again after the collapse of the Third Reich. After that, it was the turn of the French again. On July 7, 1949, my Parisian judges sentenced me to 20 years of forced labor as well as a 20-year ban on residing in France.

Since I am not aware of having made myself personally disliked by the changing rulers, there is only one political explanation for this periodic measure imposed on me: my views on the Franco-German question differed too often from those prevailing at the time, and I also committed the imprudence of expressing my differing views.

It was my overly open advocacy of the peaceful settlement of the Gdansk and Corridor conflict on July 7, 1939, that got me banned from France. If, in my opinion, no international dispute could justify the outbreak of a new world conflagration with its unimaginable, terrible consequences, then maintaining the status quo on the lower reaches of the Vistula seemed to me to be the most unjustified of all conceivable reasons for war.

I was not one of those Germans who only harbored feelings of bitterness towards the Poles. In my immediate homeland, a certain sympathy for the Polish democrats, who had provided a general for the Baden uprising in 48, had even been passed down among the population. It had contributed to my admiration for Empress Maria-Theresia that she had single-handedly deleted the word "just" from the draft text of the state treaty on the partition of Poland, as the three chancelleries involved in its drafting had called it. It was also a coincidence that in the summer of 1921, on a hike along Lake Zurich, I happened to be passing Rapperswil just as a delegation of young Poles were celebrating the remains of one of their national heroes, which had been kept in the castle there, were taken away to be buried in the once again free patriotic soil.

The restoration of Poland, however, soon confirmed the historical experience that foreign rule rarely makes people wiser and better and that the peoples, hardly liberated, tend to commit the same mistakes of which they have been victims.

The vote in Upper Silesia already involved a series of flagrant breaches of international law by Poland. The voting commissioner at the time, Count Welczeck, once told me how the individual Allies had behaved on this occasion. The commander of the French occupying forces, General Leroud, told him in advance with brutal frankness that East Upper Silesia would be annexed to Poland, whatever the result of the vote. He kept his word. On the contrary, the English general, who had been transferred to Upper Silesia because he had once signed a questionnaire in the Middle East years before as an expert on the highland dialects of Cilicia in Asia Minor, promised his unreserved support for the German cause. The Italian general had remained silent before the vote. However, it must be acknowledged that his troops were the only ones on the Allied side to defend themselves against the invading Polish insurgents and even suffered very bloody losses in the process.

It may have been painful for Warsaw that a predominantly Polish population in an area so rich in natural resources had voted for Germany despite the strongest external pressure. But can a national feeling be violated? There were also areas in Alsace and Lorraine whose population was of purely German descent and whose national sentiment had nevertheless merged with the French.

However, the failure to comply with the provisions issued for the vote in Upper Silesia were still minor sins compared to the mortal sin of peace that had been committed at Versailles with the separation of Danzig from the Reich and the establishment of the Corridor. After the Paris decision, Wilson declared that the French and Poles had completely misled him and that Warsaw had only been granted territories to which it had no claim in order to weaken Germany. Lloyd George almost refused to sign the treaty because of Danzig and the Corridor, exclaiming: "This is the cause of the coming war". The French writer and historian Jacques Bainville, who was certainly not suspected of being German-friendly, expressed exactly the same sentiment: "Danzig et le couloir, c'est le germe de la prochaine guerre".

What did the responsible circles in London, Paris and Geneva do to dispel this prophecy? What did the victorious Western powers do to eliminate in good time the source of danger predicted by their far-sighted politicians?

German propaganda once had postcards printed showing a corridor from Switzerland across France to the port city of Bordeaux. Would the French people have been granted such a corridor in a peace treaty?

had been imposed on its territory, it would certainly have been just as reluctant to accept it as the German people and would probably have reacted much earlier and much more violently.

Even the governments of the Weimar Republic that were most willing to reach an understanding never recognized the situation created by Versailles in the Gdansk and Corridor region as final, and the Locarno in the West was never followed by an East Locarno.

When Hitler came to power, it was to be expected that in his revision campaign against the Treaty of Versailles he would raise the most urgent and popular of all revision issues of the German people with particular urgency. To the general surprise of both Germany and abroad, however, he was conspicuously reticent on this issue, and the non-aggression pact concluded with Pilsudski in January 1934 even led to a noticeable easing of tensions in German-Polish relations.

Pilsudski's successors also continued the policy of rapprochement between Berlin and Warsaw, and after Munich Poland participated in the division of Czechoslovakia by taking possession of the Cieszyn region. Although the treatment of the Germans living in this area and the simultaneous tightening of measures against the German minorities in the areas of Upper Silesia and West Prussia already occupied by Poland caused some disgruntlement in Berlin, Wilhelmstrasse attached only local significance to these incidents. Ribbentrop's surprise was all the greater when, on the fifth anniversary of the signing of the German-Polish non-aggression pact, he found no response to what he considered to be very generous proposals for the final settlement of the issues between Germany and Poland in Warsaw. In return for the return of Danzig to the Reich and the granting of an extraterritorial highway and railroad line through the corridor, he had offered the final recognition of the German-Polish borders, the extension of the Non-Aggression Pact by 25 years and the transfer of the Carpatho-Ukraine to Poland, which would have thereby received the desired common border with Hungary. In addition to the granting of extraterritorial traffic routes to a free port in the Danzig area, Poland was also promised German support in its colonial demands.

In a preliminary meeting, the Reich Foreign Minister had already pointed out to his Polish partner the sacrifices Germany had made to its friendship with Italy by voluntarily renouncing South Tyrol and to a policy of good neighborliness with Italy by finally recognizing the border on the Rhine. Ribbentrop was thus hinting at the great sacrifice the Reich government was now prepared to make with the final recognition of the German-Polish border. In the eyes of Warsaw - "dei more precisely - according to the interpretation of the ruling circles in Warsaw, however, it was not Germany that was making the sacrifice with its final renunciation of East Upper Silesia, Poznan and West Prussia, but rather

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Poland, which would have made great sacrifices with the return of the German city of Danzig to the Reich and the recognition of extraterritorial transport routes through the corridor.

Historians will probably not be able to agree on what and who had a hand in the complete change of mood and front against Germany in Poland at the beginning of 1939. The thesis of a "spontaneous" awakening of Polish nationalism after Munich does not stand up to critical scrutiny. The anti-German manifestations demanding the annexation of

Danzig and East Prussia by Poland took place in too many places and too far apart, the boycott of German-speaking stores was too well synchronized, the stone-throwing at the windows of the German embassy in Warsaw and the German consulate general in Thorn coincided too closely to make their spontaneity likely.

What is certain is that it was neither the German government nor the Polish government itself that wanted this poisoning of the atmosphere.

The French government was certainly not uninvolved in this either. After Munich, the Quai d'Orsay had even considered a fundamental revision of its ties with Poland. Even if the majority of French diplomats did not go as far as their minister, who was also considering terminating the military alliance with Poland with the termination of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact, the prevailing opinion in the French Foreign Office was nevertheless favorable to an overhaul of the treaty obligations towards Warsaw. Poland's involvement in the division of Czechoslovakia, which had been much more closely allied with France, also made such an overhaul formally necessary. The army also firmly supported this position. Even generals such as Weygand and Gamelin, who belonged to ideologically opposing camps, agreed on the danger of the alliance obligations entered into with Poland after Versailles and believed that the time had come to adapt them to France's own national interests and the practical possibilities of its military support. There was a similar tendency among the parliamentarians, especially as certain Warsaw circles had adopted the Italian demands for Nice, Savoy and Tunis at the turn of 1938/39.

It can therefore not be assumed that Paris had a hand in the incitement of Poland against Germany that began at this time. The Franco-German Declaration of Friendship of December 6, 1938 committed the two countries to mutual consultation in all international affairs affecting their interests, "subject to their relations with third powers". There can be no doubt that the French government was not thinking of Poland but of England when it made this reservation.

It was therefore just as inexplicable - as it was explainable - that Paris refused the guarantee given to Poland by England on March 30, 1939 of an automatic assistance. This English declaration of guarantee, which was to make war inevitable, was the logical consequence of Hitler's actions in Prague. But the military securing of the Czech bastion was in turn a logical consequence of the events in Poland, which Hitler certainly did not want. It seems to me that the responsibility for this sequence of causes and effects cannot be attributed exclusively to Germany.

At the beginning of the 1930s, which seem almost idyllic to us today and yet were already perceived as less than peaceful at the time, a French MP once told me an anecdote he had experienced himself that is very revealing of the psychological reasons that can lead to wars between peoples. He had to speak during an election campaign in a town in south-eastern France, but had to attend a meeting of his party's executive committee the next morning. However, the election meeting had dragged on longer than planned and he missed the last night train to the capital. As he stepped out onto the station square again, a car suddenly emerged from the darkness, its driver offering him his services. "I'll pay you any price you want, just drive me to Paris as quickly as possible". The small town was barely a quarter of an hour behind them when the deputy noticed that the chauffeur sitting next to him was fumbling with his left hand in his coat pocket. Immediately afterwards he heard the safety of a revolver being released. He himself was in possession of a handgun and prepared to fight. The two men drove through the night with revolvers secretly pointed

at each other, without saying a word to each other. As they approached Paris at dawn, sweat beaded on their foreheads. Turning into the already busy neighborhoods, the two men confessed to each other. The chauffeur had assumed he was dealing with a gangster who would kill him on the way and seize his car because of the amount of the fare on offer and the speed he was obliged to drive. The deputy, for his part, had become convinced from the chauffeur's threatening behavior that he intended to rob and murder him. Only the consideration that the car might skid and overturn had prevented the two men from getting ahead of their opponent with the first shot.

When Chamberlain in Warsaw and Hitler in Prague put the safety catch on their revolvers, they were just as intent on attacking each other as the heroes of our little anecdote. But unlike them, they made it a point that their common vehicle, the old Europe and its world organization, skidded and overturned at the opening of hostilities. "La prevoyance", Abbe Galiani reproaches the supporters of preventive couches in the cultivated diplomatic language of the 18th century, "est la CHUNC des guerres actuelles de l'Europe. Si l'on voulait se donner la peine de ne rien prévoir, tout le monde serait tranquille et je ne crois pas qu'on serait plus nuilhcuirux parce qu'on ne ferait pas la guerre."

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took place in the Villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth in the early afternoon. Was it the exertions of the previous years, was it the natural fatigue after the table, Hitler, who was wearing civilian clothes, seemed to me to be very tired. His eyes were noticeably swollen, the ridges above his brows very puffy. His body had increased in fullness compared to before, albeit hardly noticeably. His fingers were more nervous. He did not observe himself tugging at his teeth with them several times during the conversation.

After general remarks about France, which essentially contained the ideas of his letter to Daladier sent a few days later, the Führer came to talk about my expulsion and had details of it presented to him. He approved in principle my plan to bring an action before a French tribunal against Henri de Kerilis, the main perpetrator of the smear campaign unleashed against me, after asking me whether I had really never committed any of the offenses charged against me by my enemies. "Such things as espionage" - and an embarrassed blush crossed his face at these words - "unfortunately exist. They're not nice, but we can't avoid them either. If you had ever come into contact with such things, you would have a hard time in court with the current hatred of Germans in Paris, and I could not give you permission for the planned trial. - I must confess that I was taken in by the Führer's shamefaced blush when he broached this question.

Hitler asked me whether I was not afraid that the French judiciary might produce forged documents and present false witnesses for the prosecution. When I answered this question in the negative, he gave his consent to the trial in Paris.

I do not know whether my petition, drafted with Professor Grimm's support, reached Justice Minister Marchandeau and what effect it would have had without the outbreak of war. Hitler had not lost sight of the matter. On the morning of September 3, Ribbentrop summoned me to the Reich Chancellery, where he was waiting for the Führer. The blue of a cloudless sky shone through the wide-open high windows of the anteroom, the sun-drenched crowns of the old oaks of the Tiergarten rustled. The weather was of that indescribable beauty and stillness with which nature loves to show itself to people at the onset of great catastrophes. The doors of the Führer's room opened softly. Ambassador

Coulondre stepped out. He held his arm over the folder containing the French declaration of war and walked with short steps towards the exit. A few seconds later the Führer crossed the threshold. As chance would have it, his first glance fell on me. "You won't be able to go to Paris now," he said with an absent face. Then he turned to the ministers and generals who had gathered in the anteroom and invited them into his room for a briefing.

Political circles, whose influence was growing daily, believed that "we would be less successful if we did not go to war". Without the use of armed force, Hitler's dominance would spread coldly across the continent and upset the European balance maintained by British policy at the price of costly wars. Churchill openly stated that "as early as October 1938 he was determined to join hands with Hitler". But when did the London government adopt this position of its opposition? Was it really inwardly determined to use the revision of the status quo in Danzig and the Corridor region as an opportunity for a preventive war, when of all the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, it was precisely these that had always been most severely criticized by the world public? Did Chamberlain perhaps still secretly adhere to peace even after Prague, but did he believe that his ideal of peace would be better served by being outwardly intransigent? Did he share the view of certain French politicians who thought Hitler's sabre-rattling was just a bluff and who believed that war could be averted by rattling the sabre in the western democracies as well? Was Ribbentrop's reported statement in Ciano's diary about the "match held ready on the European powder keg", if true, perhaps just an episode in the war of nerves, since the Reich Foreign Minister himself had repeated often enough to his officials that every word spoken to Ciano was known in London a few hours later?

There can be no doubt that even in the summer of 1939 there were still possibilities for maintaining peace in Berlin as well as in London and Paris, but that in both camps the enemy's willingness to be intransigent was greatly underestimated.

I therefore very much regret that the French government forbade me to stay in France at this time of great political tension. In my official capacity I was able to speak more freely about the dangers threatening Franco-German peace than in my official capacity. I could have pointed out to Paris in a particularly forceful manner that Berlin, and Berlin, was not bluffing.

When at the end of June 1939, in connection with rumors about the allegedly imminent internal annexation of Danzig to the Reich, German-Polish tension threatened to degenerate into war for the first time, I took the opportunity in Paris to urge all my political friends and acquaintances to work towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict. One should not be lulled into the illusion that Hitler would go to his knees if the Western powers stood firm. The German people had followed the Sudeten issue with relative equanimity; Hitler had even encountered opposition from his people with the establishment of the Reich Protectorate in Bohemia and Moravia. In the Gdansk and Corridor question, however, all Germans stood behind the government as one man, whether it was led by Hitler or someone else. Therefore, in my opinion

There would be no turning back for the Reich government in this matter. Therefore, if a war should actually break out over the revision of the status quo in Danzig and in the corridor, as far as I know Germany's military strength is sufficient to repel any French or English attack on the Rhine with bloody losses for the attacker. Poland itself, however, would be completely crushed militarily in fifteen days at the latest. It would therefore be in the interests of European peace as much as in Poland's interests for the Western powers to no

longer encourage Warsaw in its intransigence towards the German proposals, which were certainly open to discussion.

Two days after my return from this trip to Paris, I received a telephone call from the Foreign Office saying that the Quai d'Orsay had just informed the German Embassy that my residence permit in France had been revoked until further notice.

This measure was accompanied by a press campaign that could hardly be surpassed in terms of the spitefulness of its tone and the lack of objectivity of its accusations. I was accused of leading the "Fifth Column" in France, of distributing outrageous bribes to French newspapers and of maintaining an extensive spy network. This press campaign was directed by the journalist Henri de Kerilis, who had led the murderous air raid on my home town of Karlsruhe on Corpus Christi Day in 1916, in violation of international law, and who had been a household name to me since childhood.

The accusations made against me were all completely unfounded. If there ever was a German "fifth column" in France, I never had the slightest thing to do with it. I also never had any money at my disposal that would have allowed me to bribe newspapers, but in the prevailing shortage of foreign currency I was happy if I didn't have to leave the remainder of my hotel bill unpaid until my next stay in Paris. As far as the secret press fund of the German embassy was concerned, however, I later found out as head of mission that before the war it had the same ridiculously small amount as the secret press fund of the French embassy in Berlin and did not reach a thirtieth of the sum that Henri de Kerilis alone was able to withdraw from his foreign bank account when he left France in June 1940. The secret press funds of the two embassies might have served as occasional remuneration for journalistic mood reports, but would not have been enough to orient even a subordinate newspaper or editorial office in the desired direction. Therefore, when German and French journalists, with or without the approval of their governments, advocated a policy of good neighborliness between the two countries in the tense years before the war and even on the eve of the conflict, this did not speak for the capital, but for the persuasive power of the Franco-German idea of peace.

The fact that I had engaged in espionage was just as absurd as the other accusations. The persecution to which I had been subjected at the beginning of the Third Reich was not unknown in France. I would have been welcomed with open arms if I had moved to Paris as an "émigré". With my diploma from an art academy, I would have been able to indulge in any kind of espionage I wanted as a painter in Montmartre if I had felt the inclination and calling to do so. Instead, I took over the French sections of the Reich Youth Leadership and the Ribbentrop office, took part in the signing of the Paris Friendship Agreement of December 6, 1938 as an official member of the German delegation and left none of my French interlocutors in any doubt that I was a close personal associate of the Reich Foreign Minister. This would not have been a very well-chosen disguise for a spy.

The real reasons for my ban from France at the time were of course purely political, and the press campaign only sought to conceal them. One document is particularly revealing and deserves to be known in full. It is a telegram from my predecessor at the ambassadorial post in Paris, Count Welczeck, who had been instructed by the Foreign Office to make a démarche to the Quai d'Orsay about my expulsion and reported on the protest as follows:

"No. 413 of August 10, Paris, August 11, 1939 Very secret

"Bonnet received me yesterday in his country house and told me his personal view of the Abetz case, which he had arrived at after careful consideration. Bonnet told me the

following: He wanted to propose to Daladier a declaration of honor for Abetz which would make it unequivocally clear that Abetz was not suspected of espionage or of having violated French laws in any other way. - This declaration must be formulated in such a way that it removes all ground from press attacks, such as those by Kerilis. However, the accusation made by the French Government against Abetz's activities during the last week of June remained fully valid, i.e. that the latter, by the way in which he had dealt with the Gdansk problem in the course of talks, had given the impression of wanting to shake French unity and paralyze French determination.

Abetz has thus caused extraordinary difficulties for the French government. - At a time of political tension such as the present, no government can tolerate such propaganda, which leads its country to defeatism. This explains the attitude of the French government, which we must understand. - However, Abetz was not expelled, but was considered "indésirable" because of the undesirability of his presence at the present time. For this reason

Abetz has been refused re-entry to France. The French government has thus exercised a right to which every government is entitled, even if it has not issued the expulsion order. When the political turmoil has subsided in a few weeks, the granting of a French entry visa to Abetz could be considered again.

I took note of Bonnet's statement and, as instructed, presented him with our demands.

Coulondre, who came to see me yesterday, took essentially the same position as Bonnet and declared that he wanted to plead with Daladier in particular for the declaration of honor, which he considered more effective and appropriate than the right to re-enter France, which would endanger the government and therefore could not be approved.

The time of Daladier's return is still uncertain.

signed. Welczeck"

The sentences underlined in the report quoted above reflect the underlining that was made on the working copy of the telegram and was also included in the French translation of the document in my Paris court file. The reader of these underlined passages will be left with a number of questions. What was the aim of the "French determination" which, according to the accusation made against me, I had "wanted to paralyze" by the "manner of my treatment of the Gdansk problem in the course of discussions"? Why and why was I able to "cause extraordinary difficulties for the French government"? Why could my "re-entry into France put the French government in danger"?

The answers to these questions are not difficult. We were on the eve of war. The French government was no longer free to act. A large part of the French political public wondered whether the maintenance of the situation created by Versailles in Gdansk and the Corridor was a justified and sufficient reason for war and whether it would not be more appropriate to settle the German-Polish conflict in a peaceful debate. The French government was under too much pressure from the war party to want me to present arguments to their country's peace party.

The declaration of honor mentioned in the telegram was published in the form of an official press communiqué in the "Temps". I initiated a libel suit in Paris against my main slanderer, Henri de Kerilis. Lawyer Maurice Gargon from the Académie Française agreed to represent me. Professor Dr. Grimm made himself available as German legal counsel.

Hitler, who was following the whole affair closely, asked Professor Grimm and me to give him an oral report. The meeting